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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON
ACHREI / KEDOSHIM - 5767

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Tonight, the evening of Friday, April 27, will be day 25, which is 3 weeks and 4 days of the omer.

From **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org ravfrand@torah.org
date Apr 26, 2007 4:11 PM subject Rabbi Frand on Parshas Achrei Mos-Kedoshim mailed-by torah.org

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Good Shabbos!

Rav Elya Meir Bloch Interprets Rashi's Imagery

Parshas Achrei Mos contains the prohibition of eating blood. The Torah states: "Any man of the House of Israel and of the proselyte who dwells among them who will consume any blood – I shall concentrate My attention (literally 'I will turn My Face') upon the soul consuming the blood, and I will cut it off from its people." [Vayikra 17:10]. The expression "v'nasati Pannai" (I will turn My Face) is peculiar.

Parshas Bechukosai contains a similar expression: "I will turn My attention to you (u'faneesi Aleichem), I will make you fruitful and increase you; and I will establish My covenant with you." [Vayikra 26:9].

In both places, Rashi explains the expressions "v'nasati Pannai" and "u'faneesi Aleichem" to mean "I will turn away from all my other involvements and I will concentrate on giving you your just reward (or punishment)."

The difficulty with this Rashi is that this gives the impression that the Almighty is a very busy CEO, having a very busy day, with a cluttered desk and multiple phone lines ringing. His appointment book is full, He is snowed under with work, and then some angel comes in and tells Him "You have to pay off this fellow." The Almighty, as it were, buzzes His secretary and says "Hold My calls. Clear My desk. Cancel all My appointments for the rest of the day. I need to be able to turn My attention to giving this fellow his just reward."

That may be an accurate image of the CEO of a multi-billion dollar corporation. No matter how good a chief executive he is, people are only human and they can only handle so many things at once, so the concept of "clearing the desk to concentrate on something" does exist.

But the Almighty examines the whole world in a single glance. This whole imagery is irrelevant for the Almighty. So what does the Torah mean -- "V'nasati Pannai" or "U'faneesi Aleichem"?

Rav Elya Meir Bloch writes that when we observe events that occur in the world, we often consider the event itself without sufficiently considering the peripheral events. For instance, there may be a war in a particular region

that displaces entire populations of the region who then become refugees. Because of all the refugees, another region that is not directly affected by the war has a dramatic increase in population that will escalate the price of food and housing. People in that second region who have large inventories of goods that have now gone up in value will make a lot of money.

It is an old principle that one man's disaster is another man's gold mine. But we often consider such secondary affects as merely peripheral. We assume that Divine Providence (Hashgacha) directed the cosmic issue (the war) — the macro issue. The collateral damage or the collateral improvement that affects other people is assumed to be just an afterthought and not the major focus of the "Divine Plan."

It doesn't always work like that. Sometimes the Almighty moves worlds — literally — to bring about "minor" or "peripheral" outcomes. He might engage nations in war to either punish or reward a single individual.

I am loathe to engage in such speculation in practical terms. Interpreting the intent of the Hashgacha is a dangerous game to play. But I was recently at the wedding of one of my students who married a girl whose family immigrated to the United States several years ago from Uzbekistan. He came from New Jersey and she came from Tashkent. Twenty years ago, her parents had never heard of New Jersey and his parents had never heard of Uzbekistan. Great world events — the literal fall of great empires and the collapse of the Iron Curtain -- were necessary for this match to take place.

Perhaps it is a stretch to say that the Hashgacha brought down the Soviet Union so that this marriage could take place. But perhaps it is not such a stretch to say that the geo-political world of more than two-thirds of the twentieth century was stood on its head so that tens of thousands of Jews could go to Eretz Yisrael from the former Soviet Union.

This is the point that Rav Elya Meir is making. This is Rashi's intent. "I turn Myself away from all My other business to deal with meeting out appropriate reward and punishment. I can move mountains, I can make wars, I can make headlines, not necessarily for the event itself, but because some person must be rewarded or some person must be punished. I can certainly create events to exercise Divine Providence over My chosen people. I will do whatever needs to be done to insure that justice will be served."

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"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Achrei Mos-Kedoshim - These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 546 Treating Mitzvos with Respect.

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From: innernet-owner@innernet.org.il on behalf of Heritage House [innernet@gmail.com] Sent: Tuesday, November 21, 2006 11:30 AM To: innernet@innernet.org.il Subject: InnerNet - "Airport Encounter" INNERNET MAGAZINE <http://innernet.org.il> November 2006

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"AIRPORT ENCOUNTER"

by Esther Stern

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One cold wintry day, the Rosh Yeshivah of Telz, Cleveland, **Rabbi Mordechai Gifter**, was lining up at the airline checkout counter of Cleveland's airport, about to embark on a trip to New York. One of his close students had enclosed nine Cleveland-New York airline tickets inside the invitation to his wedding.

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter and eight of his students ascended the aircraft. After packing away their hand luggage in the overhead compartments, they settled back in their seats, readying themselves for two hours of flying time. They could already see themselves joyfully wishing the groom "Mazal Tov" and dancing at his simchah.

But G-d had other plans.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking," a voice blasted over the loudspeaker. "Due to a fierce blizzard in New York, we shall not be able to land at Kennedy Airport. Snow on the runway is knee-deep. All departing aircraft have been grounded, and incoming aircraft have been rerouted elsewhere. Ground controls have advised my co-pilot and I to head towards Washington National Airport."

And so it happened that Rabbi Gifter and eight of his students found themselves spending the long afternoon hours in the Washington airport, while many miles away the wedding of their dear friend and student was being celebrated without them.

The murky gray of the weather outside slowly turned to inky black as afternoon slipped into evening. It was time for Ma'ariv, the evening prayers. Searching for a private corner where they could daven, the group came across an airport cleaner mopping the floor.

"Excuse me," one of the students politely asked, "do you know of an empty room where we can say our evening prayers?"

From the man's reaction, it seemed that he had never met observant Jews in his life. His mop clattered to the floor in alarm and he stared at them open-mouthed as if they had fallen from the moon.

One student stepped forward. "A place where we could pray," he explained, enunciating each word loudly and miming a man praying.

That did the trick. The cleaner nodded slowly and directed them to a storage room where they could daven undisturbed.

The group commenced their prayers. Instead of leaving, the cleaner stood silently at the door, watching them intently, a dazed expression on his face. After they had finished, they were astonished to hear him ask, "Why don't you say Kaddish?"

"We need a minyan for Kaddish -- that is, ten adult males," one of the boys explained, "and we're missing one man to complete a minyan."

To their complete surprise, the cleaner responded, "I am a Jew. I will join your group to complete the minyan. Please," he begged, "let me say the Kaddish."

Rabbi Gifter and his students willingly agreed. The lanky airport worker, sporting a green staff apron, abandoned his mop and pail and self-consciously walked to the center of the room. Haltingly, he began reciting Kaddish, stumbling over the unfamiliar Aramaic words. Realizing that his knowledge of the text was virtually non-existent, the group patiently helped him along, word after word, until he had pronounced each difficult word in full.

After he had finished, the worker took a deep breath and said softly, "As you can see, I wasn't brought up as a practicing Jew, and I barely know anything about Judaism. I had a terrible fight with my father about ten years before his passing. After that, all contact between us was severed. I did not even attend his funeral.

"Last night he appeared to me in a dream and said, 'I know you're angry at me -- you didn't even come to my funeral -- but still, you are my only son. You must say Kaddish for my soul with a minyan, a quorum of ten Jewish men!'

"How can I say Kaddish?" I cried out, afraid he would disappear before he had a chance to advise me, 'I barely know how to say the words! And how will I find a minyan?'

"I will arrange it for you," he reassured me, and then I woke up.

"Now here you are, exactly nine of you," continued the worker, his voice full of wonder. "Heaven-sent -- literally -- so that I can say Kaddish for the benefit of my father's departed soul!"

Rabbi Gifter then told him their side of the story -- how they had come into the picture at that point. "See how G-d runs the world!" Rabbi Gifter marveled. "See how He orchestrated our meeting together! Nine invitations to a wedding, a raging snowstorm in New York, the airplane's rerouting to Washington National Airport, missing the wedding -- all this happened so that you should be able to say Kaddish for your father!"

The amazing chain of events had such a profound impact on the airport employee that it did not take much persuading on the part of Rabbi Gifter to encourage him to continue saying Kaddish with a minyan. And that precious mitzvah was the starting point of this man's complete return to his Jewish roots.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - currently 5765]

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Kedoshim

In his commentary to the command with which our sedra begins - 'You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your G-d, am holy' - Nahmanides makes a famous observation:

The meaning is as follows: the Torah has warned us against immorality and forbidden foods, but it permits sexual relations between man and wife, and the eating of certain kinds of meat and wine. Since this is so, a person could think that it is permitted to be passionately addicted to intercourse with his wife, or many wives, and be 'among those who guzzle wine or glut themselves on meat' (Proverbs 23:20) and speak freely of all profanities, since this is not explicitly forbidden. The result is that he will become a scoundrel within the permissible realm of Torah [naval bi-reshut ha-Torah]. Therefore, after listing the specific conduct that is forbidden, the Torah continues with a general command that we practise moderation even in matters which are permitted.

Nahmanides goes on to explain that this is a general feature of Jewish law: detailed examples followed by a general command. Thus in the case of ethics the Torah explicitly forbids certain kinds of conduct, such as theft, robbery, and overcharging in business. But it also contains general rules such as, 'You shall do that which is right and good' (Deut. 6: 18) - which include and going 'beyond the strict requirements of the law' and a willingness, for the sake of equity, to forego the full extent of one's legal rights.

Maimonides arrives at a similar idea, though from a different source:

For Lord will establish you as His holy people, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your G-d, and walk in His ways. (Deut. 28: 9) From this, he inferred (Hilkhot Deot, ch. 1) that we are commanded to develop certain traits of character - to be gracious, merciful, and holy, as G-d is gracious, merciful and holy. As his son, Rabbi Abraham, explained in one of his responsa (no. 63), Maimonides holds that in addition to prescribing or forbidding specific actions, Judaism requires us to develop certain virtues - what Alexis de Tocqueville called 'habits of the heart'. The Torah is concerned not only with behaviour but also with character; not just with what we do but also the kind of person we become.

The point is fundamental. To put it technically, Maimonides and Nahmanides oppose halakhic reductivism and positivism. The first, reductivism, is the idea that halakhah [Jewish law] is all there is to Judaism: the belief that if we have obeyed every law in the Shulhan Arukh, we have done all that is required of us. There is nothing else. Judaism is a set of laws, a code of conduct, a choreography of behaviour and no more.

The second idea, halakhic positivism, is that Jewish law is a self-contained, self-sufficient system with no underlying logic other than obedience to the word of G-d. It has no further purposes, no ultimate aim, no rationale - at least none that can be known to us.

Maimonides and Nahmanides believed otherwise. They held that there are matters of great religious significance which lie beyond the scope of precise legislation. They cannot be spelled out in terms of exact, exhaustive rules, because life does not obey exact, exhaustive rules.

You can keep all the laws of kashrut, implies Nahmanides, and still be a glutton. You can drink only kosher wine and still be a drunkard. You can be faithful to the laws of marriage and still be a sensualist. He calls such a person a naval bi-reshut ha-Torah, meaning, one who is coarse, crude, self-indulgent but who justifies his conduct by claiming, perhaps sincerely, that he is a strict observer of the law. Likewise, Maimonides was concerned to refute the idea that you could be an observant Jew and at the same time arrogant, insensitive, tactless, prone to anger or pride. Both believed that such people profoundly fail to understand the nature of Judaism.

The law itself points to something beyond the law. Nahmanides located this in the command, 'You shall be holy'. Maimonides found it in the phrase, 'and walk in His ways'. Both, however, were convinced that there is a dimension of the moral and spiritual life that cannot be specified in the form of precise legislation. It has to do with self-restraint, moderation, gentleness, sensitivity, and the thousand other forms of emotional literacy which you cannot learn from a book of rules, but only from experience and example.

The Talmud says (Berakhot 62a) that Rabbi Akiva followed R. Joshua wherever he went, to see how he behaved. One of the great Jewish mystics,

Rabbi Leib Saras, used to say that he travelled to Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezeritch, not to learn biblical interpretations but to see how the Rabbi tied his shoelaces. The Talmud (Makkot 22b) speaks of the 'foolish' Jews of Babylon who 'stand in the presence of a Torah scroll but not in the presence of a great human being'. A great sage is a living Torah scroll. There are textbooks and there are textpeople. We learn rules from books. But we learn virtue by finding virtuous people and seeing how they behave.

Law is not the whole of Judaism. That is why the Torah contains not only law but also narrative, and why the rabbinic literature includes not only halakhah but also aggadah: stories, speculations, and ethical reflections. Along with commentaries and codes, medieval Jewry produced ethical treatises such as Bahya ibn Pakudah's Duties of the Heart (Hovot ha-Levavot) and R. Judah of Regensburg's great work of German-Jewish spirituality, The Book of the Pious (Sefer Hassidim). The tradition was continued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the Hassidic movement in one direction, and R. Israel Salanter's Mussar movement in another.

To be holy, for Nahmanides, or to walk in G-d's ways for Maimonides, is to undergo an extended process in character-formation and moral growth. In this sense, ethics is like art. There are rules for constructing a sonnet, but obeying them does not turn you into Shakespeare. It is also like leadership. There are a few basic rules, but beyond that, leaders have little in common. Halakhah defines the basic parameters of a Jewish life. It is within those parameters that the search for moral wisdom takes place. Halakhah is a necessary but not sufficient condition of a life lived in pursuit of the ideal. That is why we have such works as the Mishnah tractate Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) and why Maimonides composed his Laws of Ethical Character (Hilkhot Deot).

To be conscious of the presence of G-d is to become a different sort of person from one who believes that the physical world is all there is, that there is no authority beyond mere power, and that there is no meaning to existence. There are people who are successful, clever or powerful - but there are also people who are holy, and you can tell it by their demeanour, their way of relating to people. They seem to point to something beyond. That, says Nahmanides, is the challenge in those simple words at the beginning of Kedoshim: 'Be holy'. Holiness is not just what we do but also the kind of person we become.

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Rabbi Yakov Haber

The Prohibition of Arayot: Some Surprising Reasons

Much of the ends of Parshiyos Acharei-Mos and K'doshim are devoted to a detailed description of the many prohibitions against 'arayot (forbidden relations) with Acharei-Mos containing the azharot, the prohibitions, and K'doshim containing the 'onshim, the punishments. The devotion of two entire sections of the Torah to these prohibitions indicates their centrality. This is further verified by the punishment of kareis (excision) imposed on violators and the fact that these prohibitions are one of only three categories of prohibitions that necessitate forfeiting one's life even in private and not during a time of religious persecution (sh'as hash'mad) rather than violate them (see Rambam, Hilchos Y'sodei HaTorah 5:2).

Interestingly, there are contradictory sources about whether to place 'arayot under the category of chukim or that of mishpatim (see Rambam - Sh'mone P'rakim (6), Yoma (67b) and marginal note there, and footnotes of R. Copperman's edition of Meshech Chochma (K'doshim 20:26). As R. Copperman suggests, one can distinguish between different types of 'arayot.) Even if they are categorized among the chukim, nonetheless, many early and later Jewish thinkers have proposed a variety of fascinating insights into these prohibitions. (See The Kashrus Laws and Ta'amei HaMitzvot

[http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2006/parsha/rhab_shmini.html] for additional discussion of ta'amei hamitzvot and their limitations.)

Rambam (Moreh N'vuchim 3:49) suggests that in order to serve as a safeguard against excessive physical relations, the Torah forbade relations with close relatives with whom one would likely be in close contact. Ramban (Acharei 18:6) rejects Rambam's reason and suggests a reason based on kabbala. A different kabbalistic approach is taken by Rabbeinu B'chaye. More recent commentaries have offered some additional, novel insights into these prohibitions. Maharal (N'sivos 'Olam; N'siv Ha'anava 4) quotes the cryptic statement of R. Chama b. Chanina (Sota 4b) that a haughty individual is viewed as if he violated all of the 'arayot prohibitions.

He suggests that the root of haughtiness is an excessive pre-occupation with one's own ego and lack of love and concern for others. Perhaps the reason for the prohibition of 'arayot is to force an individual looking for a prospective spouse to leave his immediate family so as to unite a broader range of members of K'lal Yisrael in a familial bond of love and friendship. This in turn ensures greater cohesiveness in the Jewish nation. One who is haughty and self-centered violates this theme of "reaching out" inherent within the 'arayot prohibitions. (Similarly, Maharal explains, the same Gemara states that it is as if he built a bama, an individual altar, once again indicating separation from the community. Also see Maharal for a different interpretation of the same passages in the Gemara.)

Rav S. R. Hirsch in his commentary to B'raishis (2:25), in a somewhat similar vein, suggests that at least the Noahide 'arayot are prohibited so as to ensure character diversity within the couple. Relatives are more likely to have similar strengths and weaknesses. Seeking a spouse from a wider circle would ensure different, positive character traits which would more fully complement the composite husband-wife entity in their Divine service and, in turn, a conglomeration of these combined positive traits would be passed on to their children. In his commentary to Acharei-Mos, Rav Hirsch suggests an additional reason applying to the broader spectrum of 'arayot prohibited to Jews. The Torah wanted to assure that the physical aspect of marriage serve as an enhancement of the emotional and spiritual bond and not as a substitute for it. Consequently, the love-bond between husband and wife should not already exist long before the consideration of marriage as would be the case with close relatives for if this would be the case, there would be an inherent danger that the physical component of marriage would be a separate selfish, pleasure-seeking act unrelated to the total picture of the spiritual-emotional bond.

Perhaps, on a simple plane, the Gemara in Sota quoted by Maharal can be explained as follows. (The phraseology employed here is taken from Rav S. R. Hirsch's commentary. The interpretation of the Gemara is an extension.) The Torah, by prohibiting 'arayot, elevates a physical activity which Man shares with the Animal Kingdom. Man, by surrendering to the Divine Will with his moral, free-will in this arena of physical activity and not following desire for instant, broad-based gratification, sanctifies such activity. A haughty individual fixated as he is on his own self and self-gratification and not the needs of others, does not absorb this message of viewing even activities accompanied by physical pleasure as a form not of self-service but of Divine service. Consequently, the Gemara compares such an individual to one who violates the 'arayot prohibitions.

Parshas K'doshim ends the presentation of 'arayot by reiterating the prohibitions against non-kosher food and concluding "V'Hiyisem li k'doshim" - "and you shall be Holy for Me" (20:26). What emerges then is that through controlling one's desires in surrender to the Divine Will while engaging in the two basic acts Man shares in common with the animals - eating and physical relations - one sanctifies himself by elevating even these seemingly mundane acts. Indeed, Rambam, by including precisely the prohibitions concerning food and forbidden relations in his Seifer K'dusha, highlights exactly this point. In a world permeated by unbridled, instant satisfaction and rationalization of base human desire, this message could not be more relevant.

The diversity of reasons given for this series of prohibitions serves to emphasize the enormous depths of the mitzvot of Hashem Yisbarach. Although the ultimate reasons for these and most mitzvot are hidden from us, the many insights offered by the Torah commentaries teach us an enlightening - even if only a small - glimpse as to how much Wisdom inheres within these commandments which constantly elevate us in revealed and hidden ways.

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http://www.aish.com/spirituality/philosophy/Witchcraft_and_Judaism.asp

Witchcraft & Judaism

by Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

Between G-d and the world of nature lies a bridge called the "occult". Crossing it is fraught with danger and a slip-up means falling into the abyss of idolatry.

Most children are thrilled by stories of witches and devils, Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort. In an otherwise dry and rational world, those mysterious forces add an element of fun and excitement and stir the imagination. They allow a youngster to feel that there is a way to beat a merciless and insensitive system.

Born poor through no fault of your own? No problem -- a wonderful fairy will come to your doorstep and give you the fortune you so longed for. A bully is tormenting you mercilessly? A spell will be cast and he will become a squirrel for the rest of his life.

The Blair Witch Project films give teenagers a momentary shot of excitement and dread, and an ominous whiff that maybe there really is something lurking out there.

THREE GENERAL APPROACHES

When a person matures, three general approaches towards the occult and other outside forces begin to emerge.

There are the serious, rational mindsets who laugh it all off. For them the world is rational, quantifiable and anything else is utter rubbish.

There are people who sense that the world has a spiritual dimension with mysteries that reason we can't comprehend. There is a second group of people, who tend to be spiritual, artistic, poetic, etc. They sense the world has a spiritual dimension to it, and that there are all sorts of forces and mysteries that reason can't comprehend. Theirs is a world of tea-leaf readings, tarot cards, crystal balls and psychic predictions.

Then there are those very deeply religious people, whose worldview is that of a great battle between the two forces in the world -- good and evil. The captain of the good team is God, assisted by a host of angels, saints, martyrs, etc. The captain of the bad team is the devil, assisted by demons, evil spirits and politicians. Their world is particularly threatened by the likes of Harry Potter books, due to a large degree to the severity with which witchcraft is dealt with in the Bible.

NOT JEWISH

None of these three general approaches are in keeping with Judaism. What is the Torah perspective regarding witchcraft?

The Torah takes a very negative attitude towards witchcraft in its various formats, such as:

"A sorcerer shall not be allowed to live." (Exodus 22:17)

"For you are coming into a land that G-d is granting to you; do not learn the ways of the abominations of the native people. There shall not be found amongst you ... a sorcerer, soothsayer or engager of witchcraft ... or one who calls up the dead. For it is an abomination before God, and it is on account of these abominations that G-d is giving you their land." (Deut. 18:9-12)

But why? What is the problem with it?

The so-called "devil vs. God" approach is an anathema to Judaism because of the whiff of dualism inherent in it. G-d is One, and only One. He acts in many different ways, but there are no "two" armies in the full sense of the word.

Judaism does speak of the “Satan/devil,” but it sees Satan as an agent of God, testing the sincerity of man’s deeds, the strength of his convictions, and the stamina of his moral fiber. Although this so-called devil seems to entice man to do wrong, he is not inherently an evil being. Rather, he is conducting a “sting” operation; overtly enticing to bad, but in reality working for God. A cursory reading of the beginning of Job conveys that message: G-d sends out Satan to test Job’s righteousness.

Just as a dentist or doctor tests the firmness of a bone or flesh by probing it, just as the army tests the integrity and trustworthiness of its intelligence agents by tempting them, so too does G-d test man. A test reveals the inner worthiness of a person’s deeds, demonstrating what they are really made of.

So, if magic and occult do exist, why are they so evil?

GOOD MAGIC, BAD MAGIC

We also find mention of many types of “good magic” in the Talmudic sources, such as blessings, amulets etc. How do we distinguish between the two types of spiritual forces?

The perspective most widely used is that of the Nachmanides, the great 12th century thinker. We will try to adapt and explain his perspective.

Although G-d was the sole creator of the universe, He created an autonomous system of “nature” that serves as an intermediate layer between G-d and man.

The system of nature is self-contained and has its laws and its causes and effects. Being that one can use this system without immediate recourse to God, it allows for a sort of atheism. It is easy to think that the system runs on its own, independent from God. Gravity, inertia, electro-magnetism etc. all work whether the person is a sinner or a saint. A person who buys into the phenomena of nature, without bothering to ask himself about their cause, nor being sensitive to God’s manipulation of natural events, is misled by the system into disbelief in God.

The world of the quasi-spiritual has the ability to bend the rules of nature through miracles and magic. Between G-d and this world of nature lies another bridge, which we shall call the “occult” or the quasi-spiritual. It has the ability to change and bend the rules of nature, through miracles, magic, etc. But this quasi-spiritual world, although it is more elevated than nature per se, is still not the Divine. It has its rules and laws of operation, and is perhaps more powerful than the physical world, but certainly not omnipotent.

Are we to make use of this world in the way which we are bidden to make use of the physical world?

Nachmanides says that generally speaking G-d does not desire that we make use of this world. G-d had intended for us to come to awareness of Him within the natural world, and through its phenomena. Someone who subverts the system of nature, by constantly using the supernatural world, is going against the will of God.

In those instances where holy people have used forces above nature, they’ve always emphasized the fact that the miracles thus generated only demonstrated God’s omnipotence to override natural phenomena. This is similar to (though certainly not the same as) the miracles that G-d performed for Israel in Egypt with the aim of establishing certain Divine truths. When a righteous person occasionally uses Divine intervention, it bolsters those great truths.

DANGER OF WRONG-DOING

It is at this point that the danger of real wrongdoing exists. A person who has realized that the laws of nature onto themselves are insufficient to explain the world, has tapped into this more spiritual world and come upon a melange of all sorts of “spiritual beings.” If he understands they are agents of God, this becomes a true spiritual experience. But if he mistakenly understands them to be independent of God, then he engages in idol-worship! These forces then become a source for evil when they are viewed as an alternative power to God.

Perhaps the best illustration for this dual approach is inherent in the story of the “copper snake”:

And the people spoke ill of G-d and Moses ... and G-d sent against them the burning serpents and they bit the people, and many people died ... and G-d told Moses: “Shape a snake [out of copper] and place it on a stick, and whoever was bitten will look at it and live.” Moses then made a snake of copper and put it on a stick, and if a person was bitten by a snake, he would look at the copper snake and live. (Numbers 21:4-9)

The Mishna (Rosh Hashana 29a) puts this into perspective:

Did the serpent heal or kill? Rather, when Israel looked up heavenward, and dedicated their hearts to their Heavenly Father [they would be healed], and when not, they would waste away.

Here we have both facets of the supernatural: At first, the miraculous nature of the snake caused people to realize that the plague was God’s doing, and they worked on bettering themselves. In this vein it was a positive spiritual experience.

But later things disintegrated and instead of the snake being a means to recognizing God, it became a focal point in itself, i.e. the wonderful healing snake -- separate from God’s power. That is idolatry. For this reason, many hundreds of years later, King Hezekiah had this copper snake destroyed because people turned it into an idol!

UNDERSTANDING IDOL WORSHIP

Idol worship is the perception that there are many forces with various powers over mankind and perhaps even over God. The idolater thinks that he can use these “powers” against G-d if he only knew how to wrest them away from God.

It’s as if God’s power were vested in a gun He holds in His hand. The idolater thinks that if could only wrest the gun from God, then he’d wield that power. He equates the spells of witchcraft with the ability to overpower God.

The prime example of this thinking is the evil prophet Bilaam, who is called a sorcerer by the Torah. He was a person very knowledgeable in this area of the universe. He kept scheming to use the world of magic against God. He thought he understood the mind of G-d and that with enough powerful manipulation, he would be able to outfox Him!

In a sense, this is the worst form of idolatry possible. On the one hand, the person is onto something “real.” It is not a weird looking rock that a primitive mind has fantasized into a god. Rather, it is a power that works. Yet, it is utterly false, because nothing is independent of God.

The litmus test of “spirituality” is morality. Without morality any “spirituality” is bogus or evil. For us, the litmus test of “spirituality” is morality. Any form of “spirituality” that makes no moral demands on a human being, that does not seek to bring him closer to God, or bring out the Divine potential of man, is bogus or evil spirituality.

If a person practices “occult rites” and the content thereof is a mumble of strange words, bizarre costumes, or strange rites, it is either bogus or evil. It usually is bogus, but in those cases that he has tapped into these powers, it is evil for he has divorced it from God.

The great rabbis who performed supernatural acts, were using them to bring home a message about God. They enjoined people to recognize the Creator, develop their character, be kind to others, be honest and faithful, reign in their drives, etc. Understood in the larger context of God, Torah and morality, these unusual miracles were indeed Divine revelations.

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Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

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You must not act in the (same) manner as (the people of) the land of Egypt, where you dwelled, nor may you act in the (same) manner as (the people of) the land of Canaan.(18:2) Rashi explains that the behavior of the inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan was more degenerate than that of any other nation. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the area in Egypt in which the Jews settled were more depraved than those in any other area. In the Sifra, Chazal go so far as to suggest that Klal Yisrael's presence in Egypt provided the catalyst for the moral depravity of the Egyptian People. This same deviation of the native population occurred when Klal Yisrael entered Canaan and became its inhabitants. The prospect of the Jewish settlement in Canaan stimulated the Canaanite's corruption. This is paradoxical! The Jewish People are to be a "light unto all the nations," a beacon of G-dliness and moral purity. Yet, here they are considered to be the reason for the immoral behavior that surged in these two degenerate nations. How is it feasible that, just by living in the land, the Jews had such a detrimental effect upon the people?

Chazal compare the Jewish People's settlement in Egypt to a rose growing among thorns. In fact, Hashem told the people, "In Egypt, you were as a rose among thorns. As you enter Canaan, you are to continue to be worthy of that title. Do not be influenced by the actions of the Canaanites." Chazal compare this to a king who places his only daughter in an environment populated by people of base moral character. He enjoins her not to be influenced by their deviate behavior.

When we analyze Chazal's analogy, we wonder why the king placed his daughter there in the first place? This question extends to Egypt and Canaan: If they were such immoral places, why did Hashem place Jews there? Why did He play mind games with their spiritual welfare? In explaining this anomaly, Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, first examines the obligation, which is incumbent upon every Jew, to sacrifice his life to sanctify the Name of Hashem. One must be prepared to sacrifice his very life, if that is what it takes. This phenomenon has been heroically played out during our tumultuous history, as individuals and whole families sacrificed themselves on the sword and the flame, rather than renege on their commitment to the Almighty. While this has been our heritage, can we say that we would grasp this legacy with open arms, displaying the fortitude and courage to face our persecutors with the necessary strength to say, "No! We are ready to die for our beliefs!"?

Rav Miller cites a statement from Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, that illuminates this issue. He says, "Opposition sharpens one's spiritual strength." When an opposing force challenges the individual, he rises to the challenge specifically because of the challenge he is facing. A response is always stronger than a proactive action. A practical example to which we can relate, is when a child misbehaves, his mother invariably threatens him with some form of punishment. During that moment, her love for the child is "momentarily" on hold. If she were to then see someone attacking her child, however, her reaction would be swift and furious, as she defends her child. The opposition which her child faces arouses her love.

Rav Miller cites the Talmud Chagigah 5b, which relates a conversation that took place between Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah and the sages of the time, as Rabbi Yehoshua lay on his deathbed. They wondered to whom they would turn in order to counter the heretical arguments of the Tzedukim, the Jews who only believed in the Written Law. His response has become a classic. He said, "When wisdom departs from the children (of Yisrael), then wisdom (that of the Tzedukim) also departs." This means that Hashem grants wisdom to the forces of evil to provide a challenge for the Jewish People. At a time in which the Jewish People are left bereft of their intellectual spiritual giants, He has no need to increase the wisdom of their antagonists. When Rabbi Yehoshua would pass from the world, so, too, would pass the extraordinary wisdom of the Tzedukim. There is nothing constructive in endowing the Tzedukim with challenging intellect and wisdom, because there was no one available to counter their heresy. If no one will benefit from the challenge, the challenge has no purpose.

After the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, the forces of impurity greatly increased. In reaction to this void and ensuing evil, so many righteous leaders, such as Daniel, Ezra and Mordechai, appeared.

With this principle in mind, we can now understand why Hashem chose to exile the Jewish People specifically to Egypt and Canaan, countries that were infamous for their moral depravity and perversion. Hashem knows the unique constellation of strengths and weaknesses of each individual. Only He can place His People in a situation that is challenging, for only He knows who will emerge triumphant and who will benefit from the ordeal. Man cannot undertake to make this decision due to his lack of objectivity concerning himself and certainly his cluelessness regarding the situation. Hashem knows whether a person will rise to the challenge, and, therefore, if He challenges him, it is because He knows that the person will succeed. Challenges draw out one's inner strengths and hidden potential. This is the reason that Hashem placed the Jews in countries which were morally depraved, for it is here that they would confront their greatest moral obstacles. From here, from the crucible that was Egypt and later Canaan, they would triumph and become a better people.

Let us go one step further. Talmud Sanhedrin 39b makes the following statement: Let Ovadiah (the Navi) -- who lived among two wicked people (Achav and his wife, Izevel, King and Queen of Yisrael), yet did not learn from their deeds -- challenge Eisav, who lived among two righteous people (his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka) . Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, explains that Eisav was the archenemy of Yaakov and, eventually, his descendants. Indeed, Satan, who represents the concept of evil, is his guardian angel. Amalek, his grandson, initiated an unprovoked war against the Jewish People, for no reason other than his hatred for the representatives of truth. Amalek sought to suppress the spiritual effect of the Jewish People, the Exodus and its accompanying miracles on the cosmos. An implacable hatred burned within him to erase the Jewish People from the face of the earth. Why? He inherited this virulent animus from his grandfather, Eisav, who had been raised in a loving spiritual home, but rejected it. The lofty, awesome deeds to which he had been privy only further tempered his obstinate resolve to continue hating with a vehemence. He transmitted this hatred to his offspring to such an extent that their love for falsehood passionately drove them with a suicidal force to destroy the nation that symbolized truth.

This thought illuminates for us why the Jewish People's presence in Egypt and Canaan catalyzed and even necessitated the corruption of these nations. "Opposition sharpens one's spiritual strengths": In order for the Jewish People to grow spiritually, they had to be challenged by depravity and corruption.

Rav Dessler concludes with a powerful warning to members of contemporary society. One who lives in a society that is morally and spiritually upright is paradoxically in a dangerous position. If he has chosen to oppose the righteous, he will regrettably develop an overwhelming hatred for their ideals and values, to the degree that it will even supersede that of the individual who has not been exposed to true good. Opposition brings out the resolve - and hatred. Those of us who are blessed to live in an environment that is inherently good, righteous and moral must be thankful, but also very careful to guard ourselves against any possible danger.

On the other hand, considering the moral perversity of contemporary society, we are in a unique position to react strongly against this pervasive evil and to develop our spirituality in a positive manner. It all boils down to one question: Are we challenged by contemporary society? Do we struggle against contemporary society, or have we capitulated?

Kedoshim

You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reprove your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him. you shall love your fellow as yourself. (19:17, 18)

Horav Gedalyah Schorr, zl, was wont to say that when one reproves his fellow, he should see to it that he does not magnify his sin more than

necessary. This is the underlying meaning of Lo sissa alav cheit, which is translated as, "Do not bear a sin because of him. The word sissa, however, can also be interpreted as "to raise up." Thus, we are exhorted to take extra caution that we do not make the sinner feel that his sin is too much to bear and that teshuvah, repentance, is no longer an option. Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, supplements this with the notion that one should search for some form of merit to counter the intensity of the sin.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh wonders why the Torah's vernacular is: You shall not hate in your heart your brother. It should have said, "Lo sissa b'levavecha es achicha," putting "your heart" before "your brother." Horav Menachem Mendel, zl, m'Rimanov explains that the Torah is telling us not to judge someone else's sinful behavior in accordance with "our heart." Perhaps for us, with our lev tov, good, refined heart, we would never have sinned. The other fellow, however, has a difficult heart with its own set of failings. His heart is more susceptible to sin. Thus, we are admonished not to use our heart as the barometer for judging another person's sinful behavior. How often do we judge others with our "holier than thou" attitude? Just because we are able to overcome our yetzer hora, evil inclination, we have no proof that our fellow man has a similar ability.

Horav Shmelke, zl, m'Nicklesburg was once asked how one fulfills the mitzvah of loving his fellow Jew, when the other individual acts inappropriately towards him? He explained that the entire Jewish People has one great unified neshamah. No one would ever think of hitting himself every time he has inadvertently hurt himself. It happens. One stubs his toe, bumps into the wall, bangs his hand. Is this a reason to hit himself again? Certainly not! Likewise, when another Jew hurts us, it is the result of a lack of daas, sense, intelligence. He did not realize the folly of his action. Now, if one were to reciprocate and harm him, he is actually harming himself - again! One must learn from the kamocha, yourself. Hurting another Jew is hurting ourselves. To care about and love another Jew is actually a manifestation of love for ourselves, because we are all one.

Perhaps we may suggest another understanding of the kamocha, "like yourself." concept. A secular writer once wrote the following: "Not until I became a mother did I feel how hurt my mother was when I disobeyed; not until I became a mother did I know how proud my mother was when I achieved; not until I became a mother did I realize how much my mother loves me."

We seldom put ourselves in another person's shoes. To love another person as one loves himself is to demand that we put ourselves in his shoes and feel his hurt and his joy, because until we are able to divest ourselves of ourselves and think only of our friend, we have not yet achieved a worthy relationship. We are always putting someone in "his place." What about putting ourselves in his place; feeling what he feels, going through what he is going through? Perhaps, then, our perspective would change. If it does not, then there is something seriously wrong - with us. ... Sponsored in honor of Miriam Bas Avrohom Dr. Marijah McCain

From: innernet-owner@innernet.org.il on behalf of Heritage House [innernet@gmail.com] Sent: Monday, November 14, 2005 5:28 AM To: innernet@innernet.org.il Subject: InnerNet - "Other Side of the Story" INNERNET MAGAZINE <http://innernet.org.il> November 2005

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"OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY"

by **Yehudis Samet**

* * *

There is a special mitzvah in the Torah called "Judging others favorably." This means if I see someone causing me an affront, I have an obligation first to stop, think, and consider if perhaps I am missing one crucial factor.

It's like the woman who was upset at not being invited to her friend's wedding, and held a grudge for 20 years... until the invitation finally arrived in the mail accompanied by an apology from the Post Office.

Sometimes we feel we lack either the tools or patience to judge others favorably. As a matter of fact, more often than not we feel there could not possibly be any excuse or justification for certain behavior.

We can challenge these thoughts and prove how talented and ingenious we can be in inventing excuses for others - by seeing how well we do it for ourselves... as the following story portrays:

* * *

I am, in my own humble estimation, a reasonably considerate, courteous and judicious driver. I obey signs and traffic signals. I have never willfully cut another driver off, signaled right when I meant to turn left, or honked my horn in an officially designated quiet zone. Yes, I believe I can say without fear of reproof that I am a paragon of virtue and rectitude when I drive a car.

It's when I park a car that I exhibit signs of, well, not thoughtlessness so much as chronic unawareness. Allow me to explain.

You know how sometimes you're desperately searching for a space in a busy shopping area and you note, with no small degree of annoyance, that someone ruined a perfectly good spot by parking smack in the center of a space that would otherwise easily have accommodated two cars? Well, that was probably me.

And you know how sometimes (usually when you're in a real hurry) you want to pull into (or out of) your driveway but you can't because someone left either the front or back end of their car jutting way into the driveway entrance?

Me again.

Believe me, I have never been proud of these, shall we say, unfortunate tendencies. (Vividly, I recall returning to my car one afternoon, surprised to find a rather nasty note taped to my back window, Much as I'd have liked to, I really couldn't disagree with anything in the note, unless maybe it was the spelling of the word "malicious.") On the other hand, I can't really say I was terribly troubled by them. My attitude, it now shames me to admit, hovered somewhere between "I probably should try to be more careful" and "what's the big deal, really?"

* * *

But that was before my miraculous and total rehabilitation. But I'll get to that in a moment; first, one final bit of information.

Since a recent change in my husband's work location necessitated his driving in to the office each day, he and I decided to purchase a small second car for my personal use. Because the driveway we share with our neighbor, Mr. S., is not large enough to accommodate this vehicle, I generally park it in the street in front of our house.

Hence, a typical scenario: I park the car at the end of the day, blocking a good part of the entrance to the driveway. My husband, who always comes home later than I, barely manages to squeeze his car in.

"It took me ten minutes to pull into the driveway," he informs me. "There's no way Mr. S. is going to get his van in. You 'd better re-park the car." Out I go, feeling - dare I admit it? - mildly put out. Okay, maybe there isn't a lot of room, but surely with a little bit of effort...

* * *

Now to the episode that I fervently believe has cured me forever.

I'd gotten off to a later start than usual that morning. Despite my frantic efforts to get everyone ready for school on time, my sons missed the bus.

"Great, just great," I fumed as I hustled the boys into the car. I had an extremely busy morning ahead of me and then an important early afternoon appointment. Driving the kids to school would take twenty minutes I could ill afford to spare. To top it off, I noticed the needle on the gas gauge was hovering close to empty. Oh well, there was enough gas to get me to school and back - I'd fill up later on the way to my appointment.

Twenty minutes later I was back, smoothly pulling the car up in front of the house as I usually do, leaving the car partially blocking the driveway. I gave the situation some quick consideration - my husband had taken public transportation to a meeting with a client that day and Mr. S. never got home until late in the evening - and then put the matter out of my mind.

The morning flew by. Before I knew it, it was time to leave for my appointment. In fact, if I stopped to fill the gas tank as I'd planned, I'd definitely be late. I'd just have to take my husband's car.

Really racing the clock now, I ran to the driveway, yanked the car door open, jumped in and started backing out. I'd only gone a couple of feet before I hit the brake. What was that I saw in my rear-view mirror?

A car?

Was that the back end of a car blocking my driveway?

Had someone actually had thechutzpah, the unmitigated gall, to block my driveway?

How could anyone do such a thing? How could they not stop to think that someone might be in a big hurry to get out?

Forcing myself to keep calm, I tried to determine whether there was any way at all I could maneuver past the vehicle. If I turned the wheel just a couple of degrees to the right and then carefully... no, forget it... there was absolutely no way out.

Now I was really angry. Would I give this person a piece of my mind when he showed up! Where was he anyway? Tentatively, I hit the horn, a few short beeps. Then a few not-so-short ones. Finally, I leaned on the horn, filling the air with one long, ear-piercing blast. Still no sign of the guy. I realized I had no choice but to start ringing doorbells. Fighting back tears of frustration, I slid out of the car and turned towards the street. One step, two... and the awful truth dawned on me at last.

If I'd had the time, I might have written myself a note and taped it to the car window. And believe me, I would have been careful to spell every word right.

Excerpted from the book, "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY," stories and strategies for giving others the benefit of the doubt. By Yehudis Samet of Jerusalem. Reprinted with permission. Published by ArtScroll/Mesorah, Brooklyn, NY. Web: <http://www.artscroll.com>

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From: Rabbi Goldwicht [rgoldwicht@yutorah.org] Sent: Thursday, May 04, 2006 10:23 PM Subject: Parashat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim 5766

WEEKLY INSIGHTS BY RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT
Parashat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim 5766

At the end of Parashat Kedoshim, the Torah says, "And you shall be holy unto Me, for I, G-d, am holy, and I set you apart from the nations to be Mine" (Vayikra 20:26). Rashi explains: "And I set you apart from the nations to be Mine: To desist from sin and to accept upon oneself the yoke of Heaven." Let us attempt to understand what is unique about the level of kedusha that Am Yisrael has that makes it a higher level of kedusha than the standard kedusha every human being has. Certainly, we have 613 mitzvot, while the nations of the world have only seven. However, the fact

that we have been given more mitzvot is only a quantitative difference, not a qualitative one. After all, in keeping their seven mitzvot, the other nations must also "desist from sin and accept upon themselves the yoke of Heaven." If so, how do we understand the true nature of the difference between us, according to Rashi's definition that the difference between us and them is desistance from sin and acceptance of the yoke of Heaven?

To answer this question, we must open with the words of the Ramban in Parashat Bo. Commenting on the passuk of "hachodesh hazeh lachem," the Ramban writes that there is a mitzvah to count months without giving them names. The purpose of this is to remind us of the very first month, the month in which we left Mitzrayim, and all of the miracles performed for us in that month. Every time we mention the ninth month, for instance, it is the ninth month from Exodus. This is similar to the way we remember Shabbat, referring to the second day of the week, for example, as "sheini baShabbat." This is how the calendar was counted until Churban haBayit. When we returned to Eretz Yisrael from Bavel, however, we brought with us the names which we still use today: Tishrei, Cheshvan, Kislev, and so on. However, in Tanach we find two months named even before Churban haBayit, despite the prohibition. The first naming appears in I Melachim 1:6, where it says that Shlomo began construction of the Beit HaMikdash in the month of Ziv, the second month (Iyar). The month in which he finished construction, the navi tells us in the eighth perek, was chodesh ha'eitanim, the seventh month (Tishrei). Why did Shlomo change the established halacha, giving names to the months when it was still forbidden to do so?

The word ziv appears in Uva L'Tzion as part of the translation of "the entire world is filled with His glory – malya chol ar'a ziv yekarei." Ziv is the light that shines from within nature, light that comes from daily service. Shlomo wished to teach, through the building of the Beit HaMikdash, that wherever we go in life, we must bring the Beit HaMikdash with us as an example of how to reveal the glory of Heaven through the physical existence. In the same way, we must try to reveal the glory of Heaven through our own daily lives. This is why Shlomo named the month in which the Beit HaMikdash was built Ziv, to remind us of our mission to spread the light of Hashem. One who remembers this lesson, and lives it, will merit true strength.

The day of the week in which we see a little bit of the light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu revealed through nature is Shabbat. This is why the gemara in Rosh HaShana says that the shir levi'im sang over the mussaf of Shabbat was called "haziv lach." Tosfot explains that this refers to Shirat Ha'azinu, which, when divided into six parts, has the roshei teivot "haziv lach." This is the kedusha that is unique to Am Yisrael, which the other nations do not have. Through us, the glory of Heaven is revealed in every other object that exists in this world.

The month in which we left Mitzrayim has the zodiac sign of the lamb. The lamb is an animal that is led, rather than choosing its own path. In Nissan, Hashem led us out of Mitzrayim miraculously. But one cannot receive the Torah through nissim. In order to receive Torah, you must have the ability to make your own independent decisions. Therefore, the month of Iyar, which was a month of traveling through the desert, has the zodiac sign of the ox. The ox is an animal that moves on its own. After a month of learning to act like the ox, we could receive the Torah. This occurred in the month of Sivan, which has the zodiac sign of the twins, symbolizing our partnership with Hashem in Torah.

We were granted the privilege of perceiving Hashem's light twice in the month of Ziv in our own times – on 5 Iyar and on 28 Iyar. And to the extent that we understand our mission, to bring glory to Heaven through all of our actions, we will merit kedusha, taharah, and to see the light of Hashem in our times once again, with a geulah shleimah speedily in our days.

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