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subject: Parshat Acharei Mot - Kedoshim - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

OU TORAH

The Scapegoat

Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The strangest element of the service on Yom Kippur, set out in Acharei Mot (Lev. 16: 7-22), was the ritual of the two goats, one offered as a sacrifice, the other sent away into the desert "to Azazel." They were brought before the High Priest, to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from one another: they were chosen to be as similar as possible to one another in size and appearance. Lots were drawn, one bearing the words "To the Lord," the other, "To Azazel." The one on which the lot "To the Lord" fell was offered as a sacrifice. Over the other the high priest confessed the sins of the nation and it was then taken

away into the desert hills outside Jerusalem where it plunged to its death. Tradition tells us that a red thread would be attached to its horns, half of which was removed before the animal was sent away. If the rite had been effective, the red thread would turn to white.

Sin and guilt offerings were common in ancient Israel, but this ceremony was unique. Normally confession was made over the animal to be offered as a sacrifice. In this case confession was made over the goat not offered as a sacrifice. Why the division of the offering into two? Why two identical animals whose fate, so different, was decided by the drawing of a lot? And who or what was Azazel?

The word Azazel appears nowhere else in Scripture, and three major theories emerged as to its meaning. According to the sages and Rashi it meant "a steep, rocky or hard place," in other words a description of its destination. According to Ibn Ezra (cryptically) and Nahmanides (explicitly), Azazel was the name of a spirit or demon, one of the fallen angels referred to in Genesis 6:2, similar to the goat-spirit called Pan in Greek mythology, Faunus in Latin. The third interpretation is that the word simply means "the goat [ez] that was sent away [azal]." Hence the English word "(e)scapegoat" coined by William Tyndale in his 1530 English translation of the Bible.

Maimonides offers the most compelling explanation, that the ritual was intended as a symbolic drama: "There is no doubt that sins cannot be carried like a burden, and taken off the shoulder of one being to be laid on that of another being. But these ceremonies are of a symbolic character, and serve to impress men with a certain idea, and to induce them to repent; as if to say, we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible" (Guide for the Perplexed, III:46). This makes sense, but the question remains. Why was this ritual different from all other sin or guilt offerings? Why two goats rather than one?

The simplest answer is that the High Priest's service on Yom Kippur was intended to achieve something other and more than ordinary sacrifices occasioned by sin. The Torah specifies two objectives, not one: "On this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins" (Lev. 16: 30). Normally all that was aimed at was atonement, kapparah. On Yom Kippur something else was aimed at: cleansing, purification, teharah. Atonement is for acts. Purification is for persons. Sins leave stains on the character of those who commit them, and these need to be cleansed before we can undergo catharsis and begin anew.

Sin defiles. King David felt stained after his adultery with Batsheva: "Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity and cleanse me of my sin" (Psalm 51: 4). Shakespeare has Macbeth say, after his crime, "Will these hands ne'er be clean?" The ceremony closest to the rite of the scapegoat – where an animal was let loose rather than sacrificed – was the ritual for someone who was being cleansed of a skin disease: If they have been healed of their defiling skin disease, the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the person to be cleansed. Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird ... And he is to release the live bird in the open fields. (Lev. 14: 4-7)

The released bird, like the scapegoat, was sent away carrying the impurity, the stain. Clearly this is psychological. A moral stain is not something physical. It exists in the mind, the emotions, the soul. It is hard to rid oneself of the feeling of defilement when you have committed a wrong, even when you know it has been forgiven. Some symbolic action seems necessary. The survival of such rites as Tashlikh, the "casting away" of sins on Rosh Hashanah, and Kapparot, "expiations" on the eve of Yom Kippur – the first involving crumbs, the second a live chicken – is evidence of this. Both practices were criticized by leading halakhic authorities yet both survived for the reason Maimonides gives. It is easier to feel that defilement has gone if we have had some visible representation of its departure. We feel cleansed once we see it go

somewhere, carried by something. This may not be rational, but then neither are we, much of the time.

That is the simplest explanation. The sacrificed goat represented kapparah, atonement. The goat sent away symbolised teharah, cleansing of the moral stain. But perhaps there is something more, and more fundamental, to the symbolism of the two goats.

The birth of monotheism changed the way people viewed the world. In polytheism, the elements, each of which is a different god with a different personality, clash. In monotheism, all tension – between justice and mercy, retribution and forgiveness – is located within the mind of the One God. The sages often dramatised this, in Midrash, as a dialogue between the Attribute of Justice [middat ha-din] and the Attribute of Compassion [middat rachamim]. With this single shift, external conflict between two separate forces is reconceptualised as internal, psychological conflict between two moral attributes.

This led to a reframing of the human situation. Jack Miles says something profoundly interesting about the difference between Greek and Shakespearian tragedy: The classic Greek tragedies are all versions of the same tragedy. All present the human condition as a contest between the personal and the impersonal with the impersonal inevitably victorious . . . Hamlet is another kind of tragedy . . . The contest is unlike that between doomed, noble Oedipus and an iron chain of events. It is, instead, a conflict within Hamlet's own character between 'the native hue of resolution' and 'the pale cast of thought'.

Monotheism relocates conflict from 'out there' to 'in here', transferring it from an objective fact about the world to an internal contest within the mind. This flows from our belief in God but it changes our view of the soul, the self, the human personality. It is no coincidence that the struggle between Jacob and Esau, which begins in the womb and brings their relationship to the brink of violence, is resolved only when Jacob wrestles alone at night with an unnamed adversary – according to some commentators, a portrayal of inner, psychological struggle. The next day, Jacob and Esau meet after a twenty-two year separation, and instead of fighting, they embrace and part as friends. If we can wrestle with ourselves, the Bible seems to suggest, we need not fight as enemies. Conflict, internalized, can be resolved.

In most cultures, the moral life is fraught with the danger of denial of responsibility. "It wasn't me. Or if it was, I didn't mean it. Or I had no choice." That, in part, is what the story of Adam and Eve is about. Confronted by their guilt, the man blames the woman, the woman blames the serpent. Sin plus denial of responsibility leads to paradise lost.

The supreme expression of the opposite, the ethic of responsibility, is the act of confession. "It was me, and I offer no excuses, merely admission, remorse, and a determination to change." That in essence is what the High Priest did on behalf of the whole nation, and what we now do as individuals and communities, on Yom Kippur.

Perhaps then the significance of the two goats, identical in appearance yet opposite in fate, is simply this, that they are both us. The Yom Kippur ritual dramatised the fact that we have within us two inclinations, one good (yetser tov), one bad (yetser hara). We have two minds, one emotional, one rational, said Daniel Goleman in Emotional Intelligence. Most recently Daniel Kahneman has shown how the same duality affects decision-making in Thinking, Fast and Slow. It is the oldest and newest duality of all.

The two goats – the two systems, the amygdala and prefrontal cortex – are both us. One we offer to God. But the other we disown. We let it go into the wilderness where it belongs and where it will meet a violent death. Ez azal: the goat has gone. We have relinquished the yetser hara, the instinct-driven impetuosity that leads to wrong. We do not deny our sins. We confess them. We own them. Then we let go of them. Let our sins, that might have led us into exile, be exiled. Let the wilderness reclaim the wild. Let us strive to stay close to God.

Monotheism created a new depth of human self-understanding. We have within us both good and evil. Instinct leads to evil, but we can conquer evil, as God told Cain: "Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you can master it" (Gen. 4: 6). We can face our faults because God forgives, but God only forgives when we face our faults. That involves confession, which in turn bespeaks the duality of our nature, for if we were only evil we would not confess, and if we were wholly good we would have nothing to confess. The duality of our nature is symbolized by the two identical goats with opposite fates: a vivid visual display of the nature of the moral life.

Hence a supreme irony: the scapegoat of Acharei Mot is the precise opposite of the scapegoat as generally known. "Scapegoating," as we use the word today, means blaming someone else for our troubles. The scapegoat of Yom Kippur existed so that this kind of blame would never find a home in Jewish life. We do not blame others for our fate. We accept responsibility. We say mipnei chata-enu, "because of our sins."

Those who blame others, defining themselves as victims, are destined to remain victims. Those who accept responsibility transform the world, because they have learned to transform themselves.

From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**
[ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Thursday, May 04, 2006 8:58 PM To:
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Kedoshim - -

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Achrei Mos: Tape #502 – Kissui haDam Kedoshim: Tape #95 - The Mezonos Roll: Does It Exist? Good Shabbos!

Achrei Mos: "Peripheral Events" May be the Focus of Divine Providence

Parshas Achrei Mos contains the prohibition against consuming blood: "Any man from the house of Israel or from amongst the converts who dwell in their midst who consumes any blood, I will turn My Face (v'nasati es Panai) against the soul that consumes blood and I will cut it off from its nation." [Vayikra 17:10]

The expression "v'nasati es Panai" is peculiar. Rashi comments: "I will turn away from all my (other) affairs and deal with him." This comment is also strange. Rashi's language might be appropriate if we were talking about a busy executive who has many things on his mind and many appointments. If some emergency arises which the executive must deal with right away, the executive might say, "I am going to drop everything else I'm doing, clear my calendar so to speak, and I am going to turn my attention strictly to this matter so I can take care of it."

This may be an appropriate manner of speech for a busy executive, but for the Almighty, who is able to judge the entire world in one glance, in a single millisecond, what does it mean: "I am going to turn my attention away from all other matters and only take care of him?"

Rav Elya Meir Bloch makes an interesting comment. Rav Bloch says that normally when we view things happening in the world, we look at the "major event" and then we look at the peripherals of the event. For example, when there is a war in a certain region, all the people in the region are displaced and become refugees. Because the people became refugees, the price of housing and food rises in another region (owing to the laws of supply and demand that react to the increased population of refugees), not otherwise affected by the war.

There is a well-known economic principle that one man's disaster is another man's goldmine. But we look at such "secondary effects" of a "major event" as merely being peripheral. In other words, we view Divine Providence as being responsible for the war. The war is the global issue, the cosmic issue. We view the collateral damage or the

collateral improvement that "indirectly" affects other people as a "by-the-way" after-effect of the "macro issue."

The Almighty does not always work that way. It could be that the Almighty can "move worlds", engaging entire countries in battle so as to either punish or reward a single individual.

Certainly, the Almighty can multitask with limitation. The meaning of Rashi is -- as Rav Elya Meir explains -- that sometimes the Almighty will "move mountains", make wars, or make diversionary headlines, not necessarily for the item itself but because some person has to be rewarded or some person has to be punished or some other "secondary" goal needs to be accomplished.

Kedoshim: Why Is this Portion Different From All Other Portions?
"And G-d spoke to Moses saying: 'Speak to the entire Community of Israel and tell them You must be Holy, for I the L-rd your G-d am Holy.'" [Vayikra 19:1-2]

The Medrash comments on this pasuk, that the pasuk was said "be'Hakhel," namely, it was said to all the Jewish people together. In contrast, most of the Torah was taught to Moshe, who taught it to Aharon who taught to Aharon's sons, who taught to the Elders, etc., etc. However, Moshe taught this parsha in everyone's presence.

Why is this parsha different? The Medrash answers because most of the fundamentals of Torah are dependent on this portion, called "Kedoshim Teheyu -- You shall be Holy."

The simple interpretation of this Medrash is that since there are so many important laws that are contained in this section, it was said in the presence of everyone.

Perhaps, however, the Medrash means something else. Perhaps it means that the specific command 'You shall be Holy' is so important, and has so many of the fundamentals of Torah dependent upon it, that this Mitzvah itself was given publicly.

According to the Ramba"n, this Mitzvah is the one which tells us how to live and act as Jews. The Ramba"n explains that if not for this command, a person could conceivably be a "naval birshus haTorah," meaning, he could be an observant Jew, and simultaneously a glutton. He could live an obscene life within the parameters of the Torah. He could eat as much as he wants; he could indulge in all the physical pleasures of life; and it might all be 'glatt kosher.'

If not for this mitzvah, such a person could be called a Tzadik [righteous person]. However, the Torah says, "You shall be Holy" -- you must abstain. You must act with restraint, with holiness. Do not indulge. Do not be a glutton. That is the mitzvah of Kedoshim Teheyu. It is so vital that it had to be said to the entire nation together.

The Shemen HaTov explains that a person cannot be Holy unto himself. Even though the mitzvah is a mitzvah for the individual, the individual needs the help of society. If one lives in a society which is indulgent, it becomes very difficult for that individual to remain a 'Kadosh' [holy person].

In order to achieve "You shall be holy," the cooperation of one's family, of one's city and one's nation is required. The parsha needed to be given to everyone together. When everyone is involved in conspicuous indulgence, it becomes almost impossible for an individual to act with restraint.

We see this very clearly in the society in which we live today. We are surrounded by rampant hedonism, where people instantly gratify their every whim and wish. We live in a society that does not know what kedusha [holiness] is about. The only way we can personally achieve this mitzvah of "You shall be holy," is if we not only work on ourselves, but we elevate and try to live among people who also share the ideal of Kedoshim Teheyu.

It must begin with the individual. As the Chassidic Rebbe, Reb Bunim is quoted as having said, when he was young he thought he could change the world. As he got older, he saw he could not change the entire world,

but at least he could change his city. As time went on, he saw that even that was beyond his grasp, but he said "I'll at least change my neighborhood." When he saw that that was not working, he said "I'll at least try to change my family." When he saw that that failed as well, he said, "I'll have to try to only change myself."

But once he succeeded in changing himself, then he saw that his family was different, his neighborhood was different, his city was different, and in a sense the entire world was different.

When working on this mitzvah of "Kedoshim Tiheyu," we cannot go it alone. We have to work on ourselves, and then our families, and then our neighborhoods, and then our societies.

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Surprise! There's No Such Thing as a Bashert...and 6 Other Dating Myths Debunked

By Rabbi Steven Pruzansky May 3rd, 2012

Recently, one of the popular Shabbat publications that is distributed in Israel depicted a number of myths that hinder and impair many young people's quest for their life's partners. The article appeared in Zomet, was written by Rav Yoni Lavi, and pulls no punches in an effort to highlight areas in which a change in philosophy -- and a discrediting of some of the myths -- can go a long way in promoting marriage and resolving part of the singles' "crisis." The myths follow (translation mine) and one can agree or disagree with some or all, but the issues raised are all important:

1) Every person has one special someone. Actually, everyone has many more than just one person with whom he/she can marry and establish a loving, happy and enduring relationship. The mentality that in a world of more than seven billion people there is only one person wandering about that is meant for me -- my twin, my soul mate -- who, if found, will provide me eternal happiness and who, if not found, will doom me to despair and misfortune for the rest of my life, is a dangerous illusion. There is a gigantic field of hundreds, and maybe even more, of appropriate and worthwhile mates. A successful marriage depends less on the identity of the person chosen and more on one's ability to conduct himself/herself in that marriage on a daily basis. Therefore, the task before you is not to decide "is this the one?" but rather to choose a person with whom you feel you can build a home together that is filled

with love. This transforms the quest of choosing a spouse into something that is much more logical and attainable.

2) When it is the right time, it will happen. This statement is somewhat true but also conditional – the condition being that you don't interfere with what should happen. From G-d's perspective, He has long desired to see many of his sons and daughters standing joyously under the chupah (marriage canopy). He is even prepared to assist in this process. But the problem is that there are those who, with their own hands, sabotage the process. How? Through their patterns of analysis, their manner of searching for a spouse and their conduct while dating. The central question becomes: is what stands between you and the chupah a lack of information or options? Do you need more and more advice, and more and more recommendations – or is a change in approach and a removal of [self-imposed] obstacles most desirable? If the latter, then a proper match is already available and waiting.

3) I simply haven't met the right one. How do you know? Maybe you have and you told her/him "no!" Maybe the right one is in your vicinity – even a meter away – but you ignore her because you are focused – obsessed – on some model who is unattainable [or on an ideal that is a fantasy] and therefore you are uncertain if the person you are with is the right one. Maybe you are looking in one direction, and he/she is standing in the complete opposite one?

4) Without you, I am half a person; without you, I am nothing. A single is not a "half-person." A single person is not a broken vessel or a worthless wretch. A single is a complete personality, productive and generous. Sometimes people forget that singles have lives outside of dating, and that they have other objectives in life aside from finding a spouse. Thus, aside from the questions that sound general and interesting but actually imply something else, like "Nu, what's new with you?" and the encouraging but ultimately tormenting words "soon, by you," it is permissible to ask a single, "How's work?" or, "How do you like your new car?" or, "How about meeting for coffee tomorrow night?" or, say "That new blouse is stunning!"

Before you are a "single," you are a human being. If everything in life hinges on dating, then perhaps it is time for some soul-searching. There are other substantive things in life – study, work, family, service of Hashem (G-d), hobbies, etc. And G-d-willing a relationship will also be part of that life.

5) Men disqualify women based on superficialities like appearance. But this is true not only of men but also of women. It doesn't happen all the time but it does occur too frequently. What does this say about us – the culture of the "pose" and the "show" in which we live? What does it say about us that visions of fashion models dance in our heads, drawn from the mass media, movies and advertisements, which clutter our minds and complicate our choices and the process of choosing? These are good questions for which each person must find an individualized answer. (Note: Be careful what pictures you post on Facebook. You have no idea how many potential dates are lost because of this.)

6) When it is "the one," then you will know. It is clear that you have watched too many romantic dramas, but...real life does not work like that. Most couples arrive at this most momentous decision when something in their heart trembles, when everything does not seem perfect. Moreover, if everything seems perfect, check again. Maybe you have been blinded and are overlooking something important. In relation to other significant choices in life (where to attend school, where to work, etc.) the matters are complicated and there are pros and cons for each side. One has to have confidence and faith in the person with whom you wish to take the next step – but one who expects to hear a "divine echo," or to feel butterflies in the stomach, or the sensation of burning love in his/her fingertips, will keep waiting and waiting.

7) Meeting on the Internet is for the pathetic and the desperate. Friend, you are passé. Even if there might have been something to this in the past, those days are long gone. Today, it is possible to find on the

relationship websites many pious and exceptional individuals who understand that it is mistaken to categorically reject any option that Hashem has afforded us in order to achieve our destiny. Of course, one has to exercise caution before an actual meeting takes place, but it would be a shame to discount any avenue to the sacred goal.

Those are the myths. Perhaps the most provocative aspect of the above is Rav Lavi's apparent rejection of the concept of "bashert" – the idea that Hashem has designated a particular person for us to marry and our task is merely to identify that person. But, if we were to submit to that myth, believe there is just one, that does make the task any simpler? I think not. If anything, it complicates it, adding to the difficulties of getting to know a complete stranger and deeming them "marriageable," and then tackling the esoteric question of: "Is this the one Hashem has ordained for me?" That type of pressure is liable to discomfit too many people and invalidate too many otherwise fine relationships.

Many years ago, I heard Rav Ahron Soloveichik zt"l explain that bashert (in the Talmud's language, bat ploni l'ploni) guarantees only one thing: Hashem arranges that you encounter that person. Bashert does not guarantee that you will marry that person, or that the marriage will be a happy and fulfilling one; those depend on our free choice and good middot (character traits). And even what we do after that initial encounter – pursue that person or ignore him/her; look for the good or obsess over flaws – also depends on our bechirah (free choice). As such, it is probably best to remove the bashert issue from our calculations, as it obfuscates instead of clarifies. It should remain in the realm of divine secrets to which we have no access, and which plays no role in our deliberations.

A debunking of many, if not all, of the aforementioned myths will lead to a healthier dating process and more satisfying marriages – and create Jewish homes that bring glory to the Torah and our Creator.

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Rabbi Steven Pruzansky is the spiritual leader of Congregation Bnai Yeshurun, a synagogue consisting of nearly 600 families located in Teaneck, New Jersey. He is a member of the New York and Federal Bars and is a trustee of the RCA on the Board of the Beth Din of America, as well as a dayan on the Beth Din itself. He also is a member of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, and served as the American co-spokesman for the International Rabbinic Coalition for Israel. He presently is on the Board of Directors of Pro Israel and the One Israel Fund.

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Excerpted from Rabbi Shmuel Goldin's 'Unlocking The Torah Text: An In-Depth Journey Into The Weekly Parsha- Vayikra'

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Two sentences after the Torah's mandate of Lifnei iver lo titein michshol (which includes the prohibition of misleading another, even through the passive withholding of vital information; [Talmud Bavli Moed Katan 5a] see previous study), the text delineates an equally powerful, far-reaching directive: Lo telech rachil b'amecha, "Do not travel as a gossipmonger among your people."

From this commandment and other sources in the Torah the rabbis identify three levels of prohibited interpersonal speech as falling under the general prohibition of rechilus (gossip).

1. Motzi shem ra, slander: The most severe form of prohibited interpersonal speech: the intentional spreading of damaging untruths about another individual.

2. Lashon hara, evil speech: The spreading of damaging information about another individual, even if the information is true.

3. Rechilut, gossip: The sharing of any personal information about another individual outside of that individual's presence, if there is the slightest chance that the information shared will result in the creation of ill will.

Rabbinic literature is replete with references concerning the tragic effects of unfettered speech (see Tazria-Metzora 3, Approaches D, E). The prevalence of this phenomenon (we are almost all guilty of the transgressions of prohibited speech) combines with the terrible damage that can be wrought upon the lives of others to make the ongoing effect of these sins particularly devastating.

What should our posture be, however, when the prohibition against rechilut conflicts with the prohibition of lifnei iver; when information is requested of us, the sharing of which might be damaging to one individual while the withholding of which might be damaging to another?

What if, for example, I am requested to give a job reference concerning an acquaintance and the information to which I am privy will be harmful to the candidate? What if I am asked by a friend concerning a budding romantic relationship and, again, the information that I would share would be less than flattering?

The responses of halacha to these commonly occurring dilemmas are complex and vary on a case-by-case basis, as the law struggles to reconcile the conflicting demands of these two significant mitzvot.

Four commonsense rules, however, can be helpful as a guide in all cases.

1. Explore the motivations: What is the impetus behind our intent to share this information? Are we motivated in any way by jealousy or personal animus? Are we fully aware of the underlying forces that drive us to speak?

2. Study the facts: Are we certain of the veracity of information that we intend to share? What is the nature of our sources? Too often, damaging hearsay is repeated as fact, with devastating consequences.

3. Examine the relevance: Is the information we plan to share relevant to the situation at hand? Are we limiting our response to the necessary information or are we adding and embellishing beyond the essential facts?

4. Seek halachic counsel: Many of us tend to request halachic guidance only in areas of ritual concern such as kashrut and Shabbat. Jewish law, however, is meant to serve as a guide in all arenas of life, particularly when it comes to our ethical and moral behavior.

Seeking appropriate halachic counsel before we speak about others is a sensible, often necessary step. Words, once spoken, can never be fully retracted.

On the other hand, the failure to share warranted information can cause irreparable damage to the unsuspecting. The burden of our intended action or inaction should, therefore, weigh heavily upon us. Decisions should not be made in haste, but only after due deliberation.

Consultation with the proper halachic advisor can help grant perspective, allowing the wide-ranging experience of Jewish law to inform those decisions.

Great caution must be exercised when the prohibitions of lifnei iver and rechilut collide. The welfare of others hangs in the balance.

Rabbi Yaakov Bernstein

The prohibition of marrying two sisters is included among the forbidden marriages. Ramban explains the Torah's reason: The siblings are meant to love one another, not to be rivals.

Rav S. Z. Brody shows that the 'two sisters' is unlike the other prohibited relations. Only here is the reason given that their love will turn to rivalry. Still, the punishment is as severe as the other prohibited relations: Kares (excision). From here we see how terrible is the hatred between brothers and friends, that those who naturally love one another should turn to hatred.

As well, we can now understand the extreme punishment for Rebbe Akiva's students. Rebbe Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of talmidim, all of whom died within one period, because they didn't honor one another. Granted that such behavior is not fitting for Torah scholars, but why was it necessary for them to be so severely punished? From the above, though, we see that those who should be very close are judged severely for needless jealousy and rivalry. (Som Derech, p. 115)

Jealousy

Earlier, the Torah orders us not to desire our neighbors possessions (Shmos 2:14). The Ibn Ezra explains how it is possible not to desire the good things which other people, have with the following analogy: The local villager has no dreams of marrying the princess. He knows it is not possible. Therefore it is not even considered; it is as absurd as growing wings and flying. So, too, the possessions of a person have been apportioned to that person. They must belong to him -- not to anyone else. When realizing this, a person will come to rejoice in his lot which Hashem has apportioned unto him, and not want other people's property.

However, notes Rav Brody, there is another point of view -- by fulfilling the mitzva of loving your fellow Jew, you can uproot jealousy completely from your heart...

Ramban on Ahavas Yisrael

The Torah says, "You shall love your friend as yourself." (Vayikra 19:18) Ramban explains that it is impossible to love another person exactly as oneself. Rather, the Torah is telling us that we should desire all good things for our friend. It is common that a person wants a certain good for his friend, but not everything. If he loved him completely, he would want everything for his beloved friend. At the same time, he would still want to retain more for himself! The Torah therefore tells us to shed the trait of jealousy altogether.

The epitome of this trait was Yonoson, the son of Shaul. His love of Dovid was so great, that he overcame any feelings of jealousy, and assured Dovid that he should be king instead of Yonoson!

So, there is another solution to the Ibn Ezra's question -- how is it possible to not desire other's possessions? If you love and respect other people truly, you will want all good things for them, and not be jealous of them at all.

Jealousy restricts love. A man is jealous of everyone except his son or talmid. (Sanhedrin 105b) That's because the love of the son or talmid defies all limitations. (Som Derech, p. 125 -126)

In Kesuvos 62b, the story is told of Rochel, who saw nobility in the future Rebbe Akiva, and agreed to marry him if he would go to Yeshiva. Rebbe Akiva said that all his learning was due to Rochel.

What was the noble nature of Rebbe Akiva?

The famous story is told of the man who hired himself out for three years. At the end of the three years he asked for his wages and was repeatedly told that there was nothing to give him. He threw his belongings into a sack, put them over his shoulders, and left. After the holidays, the house owner went to find him with three donkeys full of goods. After they ate and drank, the wages were given. The house owner asked, "What had you thought of me at the time I refused to give your wages?" The worker explained how he had excused in his mind all the behavior of the house owner, using the most amazing and imaginative

alibis. The house owner shouted: "It's true -- exactly as you said!" (Shabbos 127b)

That worker was Rebbe Akiva, before he learned Torah! (Yafa Einayim in the name of the Shiltos Parshas Shemos) Rav Brody points out the wondrous character of Rebbe Akiva. In such a painful situation -- going home after three years without any wages to bring his family -- nonetheless finding the most amazing excuses in order to avoid complaints, anger and hatred... This is Rebbe Akiva, who always honored his fellow.

This provides another possible explanation for the punishment of the students. They behaved in the exact reverse of their teacher! (Som Derech, p. 297)

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Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Jerusalem Post :: Friday, May 4, 2012
A SENSE OF NORMALCY :: Rabbi Berel Wein

There is something in life, intangible and indefinable as it may be, called normalcy. We all want to deal with normal people, lead normal lives and live in a society that promotes and protects normalcy. Yet since normal and normalcy are subjective terms, the reality is that from our individual point of view we bump up with abnormal people and situations all of the time.

These occurrences are very disturbing to us because they affect our own sense of normalcy and ordered well being. We somehow believe that we are living in a normal world and society and therefore are constantly surprised and disappointed, if not even disillusioned, by the abnormalities that surround us. The solution to this constant disturbance of our senses of normality is to redefine normalcy so that the world and its daily events will appear less abnormal than before. For instance, we all believe that peace among nations, tribes, groups and classes is somehow the normal way of things. Unfortunately, history teaches us that this is not at all the case. Wars are the normal world situation and there has never been a prolonged period of time since the time of Nimrod onward that the world has not had a war going on with all of its attendant horrors.

Europe passed through its longest period in many centuries without a war from the end of World War II until the Bosnian wars of the 1990's.

Of course the Cold War was enough of a scare to all concerned during that period. But that was and is normal if only viewed in the clear rearview mirror of human history.

The Arab- Israeli struggle is part of this normal abnormality syndrome. For decades the leaders of Israel and most of the Western world have deluded themselves to believe that the normalcy in the situation is live and let live, negotiations and compromise, land for peace and an acceptance of Israel as a part of the Middle East. This vision of normalcy has led to all sorts of skewed policies and dangerous tactical and strategic errors.

In reality the normalcy in this area is violence – violence between Sunni and Shiite, persecution and denigration of non-Moslems, and terrorism and hatred preached at all levels of society. I know that this is depressing but it certainly is true and realistic. Most Israelis currently perceive what is, unfortunately the real normalcy of our area and our situation.

The Pesach Hagada that we so recently read and rejoiced with stated the normal situation succinctly: "In every generation our enemies attempt to annihilate us and the Lord saves us from their hands and plans." Thus we are forced to live in a hard normalcy that allows minimum room for error and demands maximum patience, wisdom, faith and vigilance and perhaps, most importantly, loyalty to the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. Discarding false notions of normalcy becomes the key for intelligent and wise policy making and implementation.

But we should not be downhearted over this view of things. For the truth of the matter is that abnormality is the true normal of the Jewish people. There is no normal way to understand and explain the survival and influence of Judaism and the Jewish people over these many millennia. Theodor Herzl promised to normalize the Jewish people. One of the main promises of Zionism was that it would make us normal in the eyes of the world.

It has not quite turned out that way. It is obvious that our normalcy is abnormal as far as the rest of the world is concerned. And it is part of our problem, so to speak, that many in the world resent our abnormal normalcy. But if we, the Jewish people, are quick to recognize our real situation and adjust to our age old abnormality in the world we will certainly achieve within ourselves a sense of normalcy and confidence. It appears that normalcy is a subjective decision of the group or individual alone. As against the grain as it sounds, the truth is that if we will feel ourselves to be normal then we are normal. It is only when we judge ourselves and our situation by the standards of normalcy imposed upon us by the outside world. The Jewish world has always suffered from allowing others to define us or our normalcy and goals in life and human civilization. Knowing this, in effect, guarantees a more serene and normal existence for the people, the state and the Land of Israel. Shabat shalom.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: ACHREI - KEDOSHIM :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The direct message of these two parshiyot is clear: In order to live a meaningful life that contains within it the necessary elements of spiritual sanctity one must limit one's desires and physical behavior patterns. The Torah does not award accolades for great intellectual or social achievements if they are unfortunately accompanied by uninhibited physical dissolute behavior. It is not only the message that counts – it is just as much the messenger as well.

There are many laws, mitzvot and strictures that are the stuff of these two Torah parshiyot. The Talmud warns us against the dangers of false

preaching and hypocrisy. All faiths and political systems are strewn with the remains of noble ideas preached by ignoble people and dissolute leaders. The Torah is therefore prescient in demanding that Jews must first dedicate themselves to the goals of righteousness and probity before it instructs them in the details of Jewish living and normative behavior. The Torah is wary of those who immerse themselves in purifying waters while still retaining in their hands, hearts and minds the defiling creature itself. The Torah is keen to apply this concept to its entire worldview. Justice is to be pursued but only through just means. The Jewish nation is not only to be an obedient and observant nation – it is charged with being a holy nation. Without the goal of personal holiness being present in Jewish life, observance of the Torah laws oftentimes will be ineffective, a matter of rote behavior and not of spiritual uplift and improvement.

This required dedication to holiness in life is achieved in the small, every day occurrences in human life. It defines how we speak and what we say and hear. It prevents us from taking advantages of others in commerce and social relationships. It fights against our overwhelming ego and our narcissistic self. Holiness opens up to us the broad panorama of life and allows us to view the forest and not just the trees.

It demands inspiration and makes us feel unfulfilled if we achieve only knowledge. It creates a perspective of eternity and of future generations and lifts us out of the mundane world of the ever-changing present. It infuses our behavior with a sense of cosmic importance and eternal value so that everything in life, in fact living itself, is of spiritual importance and value.

It impresses upon us the realization that we are not only to be judged by our current peers but by past and future generations as well. Even achrei mot – after one's departure from this world – kedoshim tihiyu – shall later generations be able to judge one as being holy, dedicated and noble. This is the mindset that the Torah demands from us as we proceed to fulfill all of the laws and mitzvot that are detailed for us in these two parshiyot. For in the absence of such a dedication and mindset, the perfunctory observance of those laws and mitzvot cannot have the necessary effect upon our souls and lives.

Shabat shalom.

From Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
To weekly@ohr.edu
Subject Torah Weekly

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Acharei Mot - Kedoshim

For the week ending 5 May 2012 / 12 Iyyar 5772

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

G-d's Waiting Room

"When you shall come to the Land and you shall plant any food tree, you shall treat its fruit as forbidden; for three years it will be forbidden to you." (19:23)

With macabre humor, Miami Beach is called "G-d's waiting room" because it abounds with retirement homes and hotels for the elderly. Retirement is a western concept, and one that has come under criticism from doctors in recent years. Studies have found that people who don't retire but stay involved in their work (albeit at a level that befits their age) have longer life expectancies than those who retire and relax into their "golden years".

My father, alav hashalom, who passed from this world a few years ago well into his ninety-third year, was a person who worked hard throughout his life and never retired. Every morning he would still go into the office and do his work. He went in later and came back earlier,

but he still kept his life's routine. Our Sages teach that G-d conceals our time of death from us so that we should remain active to the last.

The Roman Emperor Hadrian was once passing through the city of Tiberias in Eretz Yisrael. He noticed an elderly man exerting himself, tilling the soil around his fig trees.

"Saba! (Grandfather) Saba!" called out Hadrian, "Why are you working so hard? When you were young you had to toil to make a living, but now it's time to relax. Anyway, you will never live to enjoy the fruits of your labors." The old man replied, "My task is to try and accomplish whatever my age allows.

The Almighty will do as He sees fit."

"Tell me, please, Saba, how old are you?"

"I am a hundred years old."

"A hundred years old! And you actually expect to reap what you sow?"

"If I merit to eat the fruit of my labors, well and good; and if not, my efforts will benefit my children just as I have benefited from the toil of my forebears."

Said Hadrian, "Hear me Saba! If you ever eat these figs that you are planting you must surely come and let me know."

In due course, the figs ripened and abounded with fruits. The old man thought to himself, "I must go and tell the emperor."

He filled a basket with figs and traveled to the palace. "The Emperor wishes to see me," he announced to the guards and they led him before the Hadrian's throne.

"Who are you?" asked Hadrian.

"Does the emperor remember years ago in Tiberias passing by an old man tending his figs? G-d has granted me to eat of those figs that I planted. I have brought the emperor a basketful as a gift."

Hadrian turned to his servants. "Take the figs from this elderly man and refill his basket with gold coins."

His courtiers questioned the emperor's generosity, "Why such a lavish gift for an old Jew?" Hadrian replied to them, "His Creator honored him with longevity; is it not proper that I too should accord him honor?" The Creator does not want us to sit and read the newspapers in G-d's waiting room.

Source: Vayikra Rabba 25:5

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From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>
To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>
Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas AchreiMos/Kedoshim

After the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died. (16:1)

The Midrash says that when Iyov heard about the tragic deaths of the two sons of Aharon HaKohen, he said, Af l'zos yechead libi v'yitar mimkomo; "Even for this, my heart trembles and it leaps from its place" (Iyov 37:1). Iyov had suffered as no other man. He believed that he did not deserve such extreme pain and misery to be visited upon him. He had led a virtuous and pious life, and he had done no wrong, certainly nothing of the caliber to warrant such serious punishment. He claimed that the physical/emotional pain of losing his children and his possessions paled in comparison to the mental anguish of losing his exalted standing among his peers. He was devastated, and he could not find any reason to justify his pain. His friends attempted to present reasons for his punishment, all of which Iyov vehemently refuted. He had done no wrong.

At the end of Sefer Iyov, a new participant enters into the debate - Elihu ben Barachel. This young man becomes incensed with the failure of Iyov's friends to give Iyov a satisfactory cause for his suffering, thus

allowing him to justify his self-righteousness. Elihu begins his explanation by saying that, while Iyov may have valid questions, he must understand that one cannot argue with Hashem. This alone is the reason he is wrong. Man can ask questions, but he cannot engage Hashem in a debate as if he were the Almighty's equal. One addresses Hashem in the form of a request or a prayer, but never as an argument or critique. Having said this, Elihu alludes to what happened to Nadav and Avihu, citing Aharon's non-reaction Va'yidom Aharon, "And Aharon was mute" (Vayikra 10:3). Here Iyov posits that no one had ever suffered as he did, and that no one had accepted, albeit grudgingly, his lot in life as he did. Now he hears about Aharon HaKohen. This created within him the sensation of, "My heart trembles, and leaps from its place." He begins to delve deep into his own reactions, wondering if there ever had been any justification for his questions. Perhaps all of his issues are the result of a lack of emunah, faith, in Hashem?

The question that glares at us is quite simple. Based upon the timeline of history concerning the life of Iyov, he lived either during Moshe Rabbeinu's period or later. Thus, he was certainly aware of the tragedy that had befallen Aharon's sons, as well as the unusually noble reaction of Aharon to this conflagration. Why, all of a sudden now, after Iyov himself had sustained the loss of his sons and other miseries, did he begin to tremble? Why had he not trembled earlier - before he became a partner in suffering?

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, derives a practical lesson from here. One does not hear someone else's pain until he himself has suffered in a similar manner. That is human nature. After Iyov himself suffered greatly, he was able to appreciate Aharon's reaction to a similar tragedy. When he perceived the incredible strength of character exhibited by Aharon, his unequivocal faith in the Almighty, his ability to accept the hand of strict justice without uttering a word of complaint, Iyov began to tremble. He saw that the little pedestal of questions that he had erected for himself was wrong.

Zachrah Yerushalayim yemei anyah u'merudeha, "Yerushalayim recalled the days of her affliction and sorrow" (Eicha 1:7). Simply, this means that, while in exile, the nation recalled the churban, destruction, that precipitated their present affliction and sorrow. In its commentary to Eichah, the Midrash defines merudeha as being derived from marod, to revolt/rebel. Thus, the pasuk is interpreted in the following manner: In the days of her affliction, the nation came to acknowledge and remember its revolts against Hashem. Rav Zaitchik explains that when life is good, the sun is shining in one's face, the hour is filled with joy, it is impossible to speak with the person concerning his past wrongs, his failings and iniquities. He is on cloud nine, and no one can penetrate his smug feeling. He believes he did no wrong, and, thus, he is firm and resolute; he goes on doing his own thing, ignoring the signs indicating future concern. Everybody is wrong, except him. After all, look, he has it made! Furthermore, he is unable to listen to the pleas of those who are suffering, whose lives are filled with constant misery. Someone who has it good cannot taste the bitter life of the individual whose life is a constant challenge.

When the tables are turned and the errors of the past come to haunt him, when all those "innocent" iniquities prove to be not quite so innocent, when payback time is beginning to take its toll on him, his mind becomes open to the plight of others. When the high and mighty begin to fall, they are suddenly blessed with eyes that see others and with ears that hear their pain.

It is difficult: to feel the cold when one is in a warm room; to understand hunger when one has just had a six-course dinner; to be sensitive to the needs of others when one seems to have it all. One winter, when the city of Brisk had no heat, its Rav, Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, left his heated home and stayed in the shul. He explained, "I cannot feel their cold as long as I am in a warm home."

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, was a legend in his empathy for a fellow Jew. No favor received ever went unrequited. No Jew's pain was ignored. He did not alleviate their pain - he personally felt it. In a classic hakoras hatov, gratitude, episode, related by Rabbi Paysach Krohn, we learn how the Rosh Yeshivah acknowledged and paid back a favor he had received many years earlier.

It was a cold, dreary, rainy day in Bnei Brak. Rav Shach was well into his nineties and very frail. Yet, he asked his grandson to arrange a car for him, so that he could travel to a town near Haifa. The grandson was not happy about this request, claiming that the Rosh Yeshivah was in ill health and too weak to go out in the inclement weather. The Rosh Yeshivah was adamant. He had to attend the funeral of a certain woman. It took two hours to reach the cemetery. The grandson figured it would be a large funeral if his grandfather was making such a supreme effort to attend. He was wrong. There was barely a minyan, quorum, in attendance. A small group of elderly men and women braving the cold, wind and rain, stood in solemn respect around a freshly dug grave. It was truly a sad experience. Apparently, the woman had had no children, and the few remaining relatives and some neighbors gathered together to pay her final respects.

When the funeral was over, the venerable Rosh Yeshivah recited Kaddish Yasom, the Mourner's Kaddish. He stood there a few moments amid the pelting rain and simply stared at the grave. His grandson attempted to take him to the car, but Rav Shach was not yet ready. It almost seemed as if he wanted to remain in the cold rain and get wet. Finally, shivering and shaking, the Rosh Yeshivah signaled that he was ready to return.

Clearly, this entire day, beginning with his grandfather's request to attend the funeral, to stand out in the cold, stymied Rav Shach's grandson. He expressed his incredulity. The response came by way of a story, which speaks volumes about Rav Shach's perception of the middah, character trait, of hakoras hatov, gratitude.

When Rav Shach was a young boy of twelve, a yeshivah for select illuyim, brilliant students, opened. There was no dormitory, and food was sparse. The older students slept on the benches of the shul, while the younger ones found a place on the floor. Rav Shach was by far the youngest student. Despite his youth, he was granted a place on a bench. This attests to his brilliance and dedication.

While the conditions were tolerable in the spring and summer, the harsh winter brought its challenge. There was no heat. It is difficult to sleep on a hard floor; a cold floor is almost impossible to sleep on. A few months of this physical deprivation was getting to the budding young scholar. After all, he was only a "kid." What made things worse was the letters that arrived from his uncle, a prosperous blacksmith, asking his nephew to join him in the business. The young boy ruminated over the offer. Veritably, he wanted to learn and dedicate his life to Torah, but if he froze at night and, as a result, could not sleep, he could not learn. He might as well become a frum, observant, prosperous professional. He decided to give it one more day before making a decision.

That morning, a woman came to the yeshivah with a small wagon filled with blankets. Apparently, her husband was a blanket salesman, who had tragically been killed in an accident. She was here to donate the remaining blankets to the yeshivah students. Rav Shach was one of the fortunate recipients of a blanket. It made a world of difference for him, and it played a critical role in keeping the young boy in yeshivah that winter.

End of story? No. Rav Shach went on to become the gadol ha'dor, preeminent Torah leader of the generation. That woman, regrettably, had a sad life. She never remarried. After moving to Eretz Yisrael, she settled in Haifa. She died as she lived: quietly, without fanfare. "This is why I attended her funeral," Rav Shach said to his grandson.

"But why did you keep on standing there, after the funeral, getting soaked to the skin?" the grandson asked. "It has been so many years

since that incident, and, over time, one tends to forget. I wanted to remain out in the cold, so that the frigid sensation that gripped me then would inspire me now to pay the proper gratitude for her gift."

No one, no one of you shall approach any kin of his flesh to uncover nakedness...and you shall not give any of your progeny to pass it to the Molech... I am Hashem. (18:6,21)

After enumerating a list of sexual aberrations, the Torah concludes with an exhortation not to pass one's child to the molech god. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains the rationale for this juxtaposition. He suggests a practical reason for the prohibition of the laws concerning ervah, physical relations with close relatives, explaining that a relationship between husband and wife should be predicated upon bonds of mutual love, which is the result of marriage. Any relationship which has been linked prior to marriage by bonds of mutual attachment and affection, or of familial love, precludes the link founded in - and based upon - marriage. This transforms the relationship into nothing more than crude physical attraction, which is common in the animal kingdom. If the marriage is founded upon the ideals of Torah, then what otherwise is ervah is elevated to the sphere of mitzvah.

The law against passing a child to the molech teaches us that, just as children should be the product of a marriage built upon love and not blind physical urges, so, too, should the lives of these children not be given over to the random workings of some blind physical force. Children are to be conceived under the protection of Hashem's law, hence the prohibitions concerning ervah. Likewise, their lives and fortunes are also dominated by Divine protection and guidance! Regarding the children, Hashem says, Ani Hashem, "I am G-d." Your children must be educated in My ways. Children must be "turned over" to Hashem - not to the Molech. Our children do not belong to us. They belong to Hashem, and we should raise them in that manner. Raising children is a privilege which is accorded to parents as long as they understand that they are nothing more than Hashem's agents. When parents make decisions concerning their children's education based upon their own personal preferences, they are abusing this privilege. Molech was a pagan godhead, the service of which represented a parent acting without direction from Above. This is not the Torah way Throughout the millennia, Jewish parents have sacrificed in order to provide their children with the proper Torah values. They have realized the trust that Hashem placed in them. Horav Shmuel Wosner, Shlita, was asked if there was truth to the story that his mother had given up a career as an opera singer after a great tzaddik, righteous person, promised her that if she did, she would be blessed with a son who would achieve even greater fame in the Torah world. He replied, "I never heard her say it, but my mother encouraged my learning, saying that I have no idea what she gave up for me!"

Parashas Kedoshim

Speak to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael, and you shall say to them, "You shall be holy for I am holy." (19:2)

A while ago I received a call from a Peninim reader, concerned about the fact that I had distinguished between the focus of punishment meted out to a Jew and that meted out to a gentile. Hashem's punishment of the Jewish nation is therapeutic, to elevate and better the individual Jews. The punishment that Hashem metes out to the gentile world is punitive. Apparently, more is demanded of us. The caller took issue with the notion that I was differentiating between people. I apologized, but reality is what it is. At times, it might make us uncomfortable. In Parashas Kedoshim, we are presented with the injunction, Kedoshim tiheyu, which basically exhorts the Jew to strive for holiness. We are different; our lives are different; our goals and objectives are different. In order to achieve what is expected of us, we must maintain ourselves on an elevated status of morality, ethicality and holiness. This is why Kedoshim tiheyu plays such a critical role in Judaism.

Daber el kol adas Yisrael, "Speak to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael." The pasuk emphasizes that this command should be delivered to the entire nation assembled together. Rashi explains that this section of the Torah was spoken to an assembly of the entire nation. This is because a majority of the essential elements of Torah are dependent upon it. Rashi's comment begs elucidation. Was not the entire Torah transmitted to the whole congregation? The Torah is not exclusionary. Its mitzvos apply to everyone. Why was this particular section of Torah presented in a communal setting? Indeed, Rashi details the dynamics of the teaching process to Klal Yisrael. In the process, the entire congregation received one lesson; the Zekeinim, Elders, received two; Bnei Aharon heard these lessons, and Aharon HaKohen heard it four times. Thus, everybody was taught the Torah. Why is Kedoshim tiheyu singled out to be taught to everyone at one time?

The Sifsei Chachamim explains that the other lessons were addressed primarily to the men, while the mitzvah of Kedoshim tiheyu was spoken to all: men, women and children. Alternatively, the Torah was normally taught to the people in sections, allowing for parts to be explained. Parashas Kedoshim was unique in that it was read to the people in one continuous address. Maharal adds that, whereas the nation was not compelled to attend the other Torah teaching sessions, the gathering for Kedoshim tiheyu was compulsory. All were required to be in attendance. Apparently, Kedoshim tiheyu, replete with its many mitzvos addressing kedushas Yisrael, the sanctity of the Jew, could not be missed; they could neither be heard in chapters, nor could the nation be broken into groups for its address. They had to all be together, to hear it all in one session. Why is this?

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, analyzes what it means to have Hashem in our presence and the implications. He cites the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 3:7, "If ten people sit together and engage in Torah study, the Divine Presence rests among them, as it is stated, Elokim nitzav ba'adas Keil, 'G-d stands in an assembly of Keil.'" The Mishnah continues that Hashem's Presence rests on a group of five people, citing the pasuk, "He has established His gathering upon earth." Using the pasuk, "In the midst of Judges He judges," Chazal say that the Divine Presence resides in an assembly of three. Two people also have the opportunity for Hashem's Presence to be in their midst, as it says, "Then the G-d-fearing people spoke, one man to his neighbor, and Hashem listened and heard." Last, they prove that this Divine phenomenon applies even when one person studies Torah, quoting the pasuk, "In every place in which I cause My Name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you."

This Mishnah evokes an obvious question: If a single, solitary person feels Hashem's Presence when he is engaged in a spiritual endeavor, why is it necessary to quote other pesukim to prove that larger groups sense Hashem's Presence as well? The Mishnah enumerates these pesukim by design. Eitz Yosef explains that each of the pesukim describes a different manifestation of Hashem's Presence as it rests among us. When a person studies alone, Hashem says, Avo eilecha, "I will come to you." Avo is a term used to describe a chance encounter. When two people study together, the usual expression is Vayaksheiv Hashem va'yishma, "Hashem listened and heard." This indicates greater intent and an increased sensation of His Presence. As the number of people ascends to three, five and ten, the degrees of manifestation of Hashem's Presence likewise increases.

Rav Miller derives an important principle from the Mishnah: Hashem manifests His Presence in our midst, in varying degrees. The larger the group, the greater the intensity with which the members feel His Presence. A minyan, quorum of ten, feels Hashem's Presence more fervently and with greater passion than a group of five. Five people have a deeper awareness, a more profound knowledge of His Presence, than a smaller group of three, two or one. Additionally, the feeling of closeness to Hashem does not necessarily have to be inspired exclusively by Torah study. It may be precipitated by any gathering that is for the sake of

Heaven, which increases kavod Shomayim, the glory of Heaven. Any assembly whose focus and goal are to spread the light of spirituality in the world, earns the Divine experience. The larger the number, the greater the intensity and more potent the feeling of the Divine Presence. Hashem never leaves us, regardless of our iniquitous actions. The problem is that when we sin, we become spiritually defiled, causing us to become numb. We are unable to sense the Divine Spirit within our midst. A great Chassidic Master said, "One can be for Hashem, or he can be against Hashem, but he cannot be without Hashem. The Almighty is always there."

If a Presence exists even when the individual is in spiritual decline, one may deduce that it certainly exists when he is on a lofty spiritual plane. Hashem's Presence is magnified in greater intensity when the entire nation gathers together for the exclusive purpose of hearing Hashem's word. This was the nature of the Hakhel gathering. It was an experience that was without equal. Certainly, Hashem's Presence was felt in a manner that was unprecedented and unrivaled.

With this in mind, we must acknowledge something of which we are acutely aware deep down, but all too often ignore. Hashem is with us all of the time. His Presence is felt even stronger when we are in shul, with many other Jews. Yet, this awareness does not seem to accomplish anything for us. Does it change how we act, how we speak, how we interact with others? Does our mode of prayer take on a new fervor knowing that Hashem is with us - waiting, listening? We have an awesome responsibility to maintain standards that acknowledges the Company that is constantly accompanying us.

You shall not make a cut in your flesh for the dead...My Shabbosos you shall observe and My Sanctuary shall you revere. I am Hashem. Do not turn to (the sorcery of) the Ovos and Yidanim (those who claim to speak with the dead). (Vayikra 19:28, 30, 31)

There is no way of getting around it: the death of a loved one is one of life's most crippling experiences. This is especially true for the death of a parent - regardless of his or her age. Respect for parents and the deceased has long been one of the hallmarks of Judaism. When a parent passes on to the World of Truth, the surviving family reacts with grief, followed by public displays of reverence. The family observes shivah, the seven-day mourning period. Sons recite Kaddish for eleven months following the death of a parent. It is a time when one is able to attend to his/her emotional needs, as well as to acknowledge an intellectual appreciation of the deceased both in general and, in particular, his/her own personal relationship. The Kaddish prayer is a form of sanctifying and affirming that the Torah ideals which had been so much a part of the life of the deceased continue unabated in his/her offspring.

The Torah decries over-excessive mourning and displays of grief. This was a practice employed by the pagans, who either venerated death or considered it the very end to everything. Judaism is life-oriented and encourages mourning practices that are restricted and life-affirming, such as Shabbos observance, Torah study and praying in a shul. This explains the juxtaposition of the above pesukim.

The Bostoner Rebbe, zl, relates that in America, circa 1930 through 1950, the only Jewish observance which Jews kept religiously, the only contact they had with their local shul, was to recite Kaddish for the passing of a parent. They kept very little to nothing else, but Kaddish for a parent was different. Jews in those days had respect for parents. They represented an old world from which the children had divorced themselves. In some instances, their parents represented their last ties to Judaism.

The Rebbe relates that once on a long, hot summer Shabbos, he was giving a shiur in Pirkei Avos in the Bostoner shul. In the middle of the shiur, a young man dressed in work clothes entered and asked the Rebbe, "Can I ask the Rabbi a question?" The Rebbe promptly responded in the affirmative. Obviously, the young man did not understand that one does not interrupt a shiur.

Apparently, he had just lost a parent a few days earlier, and he was still in the middle of shivah. Just before Shabbos, someone had mentioned to him that shivah is not observed on Shabbos, since it is inconsistent with the joy inherent in Shabbos Kodesh. The Rebbe confirmed this. The fellow looked at the Rebbe, and, in all seriousness born of naiveté, he asked, "Can I go to my Saturday job as usual, or must I sit at home?" The question bespoke an innocence which was the consequence of ignorance of his own religion and was heartbreaking. He had heard of shivah, even Yizkor, but Shabbos - one of Judaism's staples - was foreign to him. He had not the vaguest idea what Shabbos was all about. He typified members of the American Jewish community, an entire generation of Jews lost to their heritage. At least this generation was aware of - and understood - the significance of sitting shivah. Regrettably, the generation which followed was clueless about shiva as well.

That was "then." What about "now"? Decades ago Jews, regardless of their affiliation and preferred mode of Jewish observance, made a point to remember parents. Shivah and Kaddish were Jewish fundamentals which they remembered and to which they adhered. After all, it was for their parents. It is for this reason that I wonder how we have strayed so far, so quickly, from these basic rituals. Yes, the family aspect which was so prevalent, the togetherness of family which was the symbol of reverence for the deceased parent, is something of the past.

We are living in a time when death creates a vacuum - a leadership void - which creates the opportunity for sibling rivalry. The greater position, the more lucrative the material bounty, the more covetous and grudgingly the various family members become of one another. Sides are taken, positions are carved out and the love and harmony which reigned for a lifetime have suddenly been torn asunder. All for a couple of dollars and a little kavod, glory. The neshamah, soul of the deceased, cries out, "What about respect? Where is your Kibud Av V'Eim, respect for parents?" Is this what a parent deserves to witness while he/she is in the Olam H'Emes, World of Truth? This is what I mean: Life was much simpler then. They did not know Shabbos, but they understood the significance of shivah. Today, we are aware of Shabbos, but have lost the true meaning of shivah. Well, it is all part of the same Torah. One does not go without the other.

Va'ani Tefillah

Borei refuos - He creates cures.

Once again, we return to the underlying concept of Hu levado, "He alone." Hashem is behind it all. This is probably most ignored in the world of medicine - not necessarily only by the physician, who is acutely aware of how helpless he really is, but even by the patient, who views the physician, the therapy and medications as the source of his healing - when, in fact, it is all Hashem's work. There is no doubt that we constantly hear of medical advances, new medicines and new skills that save countless lives on an almost daily basis. The problem is that the more we hear, the more we think and begin to believe that these advances are all part of science, all the products of scientific discovery and brilliant acumen. The Malachim, Angels, see and know the truth. It is the Hu levado, Who, is Borei refuos, creates cures. Hashem prepares the wonders of medicine which benefit our lives. The gift of intelligence which the scientific researchers "seem" to possess; their insight and brilliance; their skills and successful findings are the products of Hashem, Who grants them the possibility for these discoveries. When we recite these words we should imbue ourselves with this awareness so that we not lose sight of the truth.

In memory of my dear wife, Helen - Rachel bas Avraham a"h niftar 13 Iyar 5751 Dr. Jacob Massouda

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Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit

Weekly Halacha
by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

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

Avoiding Hatred between Jews

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

Discussion: There are two basic approaches in the interpretation of the verse cited above. Some commentators¹ explain the verse as relating to matters which are bein adam l'Makom, between man and Hashem. If a Jew observes another Jew transgressing any one of the mitzvot, it is incumbent upon the observer to reprove the sinner in regard to his sin. Failure to do so will ultimately result in hating the sinner, since it is permitted—under certain circumstances²—to hate a Jew who purposefully and deliberately disregards the commands of the Torah. Rebuke, therefore, is the means through which hatred of another Jew can be avoided, since rebuke may be the impetus for the potential transgressor to change his ways. [The halachos concerning the proper method of rebuke are intricate³ and not the subject of this Discussion.]

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

Most of the time, the questioning will yield one of the following outcomes:

- * The alleged incident never took place; it was either completely fabricated or greatly exaggerated.
- * The incident did happen but it was not the intention or fault of the accused.
- * The offender will sincerely apologize for his misdeed, the incident will be forgotten, and peace will be restored.
- * The offender will justify his actions to the satisfaction of the injured party.

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

The notion of avoiding hatred by reproofing one's friend is not merely a “nice idea” based upon an explanation of a pasuk in the Torah. It is a halachic obligation agreed upon by all of the poskim, from the Rambam⁵ down to the Mishnah Berurah.⁶

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

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

If, after properly rebuking the offender, the latter remains antagonistic and unapologetic, it is then permitted for the injured party to despise the person who did him harm.⁹

- 1 See commentary of Tosafos (Hadar Zkeinim), Tur, and Chezkuni (second opinion). This is also the simple explanation of the Talmud (Arachin 16b).
- 2 See Beir Halachah 1:1, s.v. v'lo; Ahavas Chesed (Margenisa Tavah #17); Dibros Moshe, Bava Metzia, pg. 356.
- 3 See O.C. 608:2.
- 4 See commentary of Rashbam, Ramban and Chezkuni (first opinion), Ohr ha-Chayim and Rav S.R. Hirsch.
- 5 Hilchos Deiyos 6:6. See Lechem Mishneh who quotes the Talmudic source, and Kiryas Melech who quotes a source from the Midrash.
- 6 156:4, quoting the Sefer ha-Mitzvos. This halachah is also quoted by the Magen Avraham and Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav, ibid.
- 7 Although the Rambam mentions such conduct only in regard to an offender who is unable to repent, many other poskim do not differentiate and allow one to act with middas chasidus towards any offender. They argue that since the Torah's main concern is the possibility of hatred developing, if the offended person will forgive the offender wholeheartedly, no rebuke is necessary; see Lechem Mishneh, Hilchos Deiyos 6:6 and Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav, O.C. 156:4. See also Rav S. R. Hirsch commentary to this pasuk.
- 8 Mishnah Berurah 156:4.
- 9 Kehilos Yaakov 10:54 and Birchas Peretz (Kedoshim), based on the opinion of the Yeremyim. See Bein Adam l'Chaveiro (Machon Toras ha-Adam l'Adam) for a complete elaboration of this subject.

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Acharei Mot-Kedoshim - Music During Sefira
Rabbi Asher Meir

The time of counting omer is one of partial mourning due to the deaths of the students of Rabbi Akiva during this period (SA OC 493:1) as well as other tragedies which various communities experienced specifically at this time of year. One aspect of this mourning is that it is forbidden to listen to instrumental music (Arukh HaShulchan OC 493:2). Yet vocal music is permitted. It seems that instrumental music is more important and joyous than mere singing. Let us examine the meaning of this distinction.

A clear source for this distinction is found in a gemara which discusses the prohibition on music due to mourning over the destruction of the Mikdash.

The gemara concludes that from the verse "Don't drink wine with song" (Yishayahu 24:9) we can learn that instrumental music is forbidden; from the additional verse "Israel, don't rejoice unto delight like the nations" (Hoshea 9:1) we learn that vocal music is also forbidden. From the order we learn that there is a greater stricture for instrumental music. And according to Rashi there is also a practical distinction, in that vocal music is only forbidden in a wine house whereas instrumental music is forbidden in general. (Gittin 7a. Mourning over the Mikdash limits secular music of modest content. Immodest songs are always forbidden whereas songs of praise to G-d are permitted even nowadays except during sefira.)

A later source which reinforces this distinction is the statement of the Maharil that it is improper to make a wedding without musical

instruments, for these are the main way we gladden the bride and groom (Maharil Eiruvei Chatzeirot).

Yet there is another source which seems to teach the opposite. The gemara in Arkhin (11a) discusses the music of the Leviim and others which accompanied the libations in the Mikdash, and concludes that the primary music is vocal music; the instruments are there only to accompany and adorn the singing. So in the Temple service it is the vocal music which is most important! What's the difference?

There is much evidence to support the following explanation: Vocal music expresses joy, whereas instrumental music induces joy. Vocal music is "inside-out"; instrumental music "outside-in". This suits their nature as well: singing comes from inside of us, whereas instrumental music is from the instrument which is external to us; it is an instrument for creating rejoicing.

For example, the two examples we find in the Torah of vocal singing are the Song of the Sea and the Song of the Well.

In both cases, miracle which caused the people to rejoice, and subsequently they sang. In fact, in each case the Torah explicitly tells us "Then Moshe and the children of Israel sang" (Shemot 15:1); "Then Israel sang" (Bamidbar 21:17).

By comparison, here are two prominent examples of instrumental music: When Shaul was in a terrified and unsettled state of mind, he sought "someone who knows how to play the harp" (I Shmuel 16:16). And when Elisha sought prophetic inspiration, he said "Bring me player"; and when the player played then G-d's spirit settled on him (II Melakhim 3:15). In each case the playing was not an expression of a state of mind but on the contrary a means to bring about an uplifted state of mind.

A seeming exception is the statement of Shlomo that in order to entertain himself he acquired "sharim vesharot", which literally translates as "men and women singers". Yet Targum and Rashi explain that this term actually refers to kinds of musical instruments (Kohelet 2:8).

Now we can understand the difference between the various halakhot. In the case of mourning, the main prohibition is inducing rejoicing not expressing it. Likewise, the purpose of music at a wedding is in order to induce joy in the bride and groom. So in these cases instrumental music is primary.

But in the Temple, the rejoicing stemmed from the beauty and holiness of the Temple service. The music was meant to express this joy, not to create it. "Which service is through joy and a glad heart? It is singing." (Arkhin 11a) In this case the singing is primary, and the instruments are only an accompaniment.

Rabbi Asher Meir is the author of the book Meaning in Mitzvot, distributed by Feldheim. The book provides insights into the inner meaning of our daily practices, following the order of the 221 chapters of the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh.