BS"D
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Friday is the 22th Day of the Omer

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org**. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

The double parsha Acharei Mot - Kedoshim is the middle of Sefer Vayikra and thus the middle of the entire Torah. The Torah frequently uses a chiastic structure, with parallel statements focusing on the middle – a form such as A, B, C, D, C', B',A'. In this structure, A and A' present parallel messages, as do B and B', and C and C'. The messages focus on D, the central portion, which is the most important message. Following this pattern, we would expect Acharei Mot and Kedoshim to have the most important material in the Torah.

Acharei Mot opens with the ceremony of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. Since chapter 3 of Bereshis, when God exiled Adam and Chava from Gan Eden, a recurring message in the Torah has been God's desire to have a close relationship with humans (and especially with Jews). A mirror of that theme is man's desire to find a way to come close to our Creator, as Adam and Chava were originally. The generation of the Exodus had that opportunity at Har Sinai, but the people could not handle the intensity and awe of this experience. After the first two statements, they asked Moshe to listen to the remainder and relate God's words to them.

The dedication of the Mishkan provided another opportunity for the Kohenim to approach close to God's presence. However, a human cannot see God, or come close to His presence and survive, except with God's invitation. Acharei Mot presents the one time a year when a human (other than Moshe, a special case) could approach God's presence and survive. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol would undertake special preparations (including three days abstaining from sexual relations, fasting on the day, visiting the mikvah and changing clothes five times, and wearing the special garments of the Kohen Gadol). Following these steps exactly, the Kohen Gadol could bring his fire pot, burn his incense, and the cloud of his incense would mix with God's presence (God's cloud above the Holy of Holies). Any departure from the exact instructions would lead to immediate death, as the community discovered when Aharon's two sons tried to participate with their father (at the dedication of the Mishkan) and died immediately from a fire from heaven.

The Torah deals with the Yom Kippur ritual and Har Sinai in a similar fashion. At Har Sinai, immediately after the Aseret Dibrot, the Torah presents Mishpatim. This parsha presents a series of social justice mitzvot based on the Ten Commandments, translating the ten general statements into concrete laws of behavior. We see this pattern again in Kedoshim. If we want to come close to God, the korbanot (sacrifices) and the Kohen Gadol's ritual on Yom Kippur present the rituals. However, the Torah then translates the rituals into specific mitzvot. Rabbi David Fohrman translates the mitzvot of Kedoshim in terms of the concepts of yours, mine, and ours. Social justice requires that we share (especially with the poor) what is ours. We do not steal or take what belongs to others or to God. When making a covenant with others or with God, we must approach the covenant honestly, fully intending from the beginning to deal honestly. (The sin of Piggul, intending to keep and eat any of a Shelamim (peace or shared) sacrifice after the period permitted to eat from it, is the way the Torah presents the sin of going into a covenant insincerely.) One way of understanding Kedoshim is that we must be holy because God is holy (19:2). God is telling us that if we want to come close to His presence, we can only do so by practicing social justice. This message reinforces what we learn in Mishpatim. The parallels between these two parshot reinforce the connection between Har Sinai and the Mishkan. In this sense, the reason for the Mishkan is to recreate and reinforce the Sinai experience – bringing the holy experience into everyday life, both by the Mishkan and elsewhere.

This summer, when we approach Tisha B'Av, we shall read the warnings of the prophets to our ancestors that God was very angry about their lack of compassion for the poor, widows, orphans, and other vulnerable members of our community. The prophets did not make up these warnings. They are in many places in the Torah, perhaps most clearly in Mishpatim and Kedoshim. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, devoted much of his energy to helping the vulnerable. He led a protest in front of the Soviet Embassy to draw attention to the anti-religious policies and harsh treatment of Jews under the Soviet government 40 years ago. He deplored anti-Semitic outbreaks in Potomac, such as the high school students throwing raw eggs and ripe tomatoes at him as he walked to services on Yom Kippur. He urged all his congregants to do more to help the needy members of our society. We see his concerns again in the Torah reading for this week.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Tova bat Narges, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, Ruth bat Sarah, and Tova bat Narges, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names of coronavirus victims on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Kedoshim: Burden of Reproof

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1997

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

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

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

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

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

As the Chofetz Chaim traveled around Poland and Russia to sell his works, he entered an inn in Vilna and beheld a disturbing sight. A burly young man was about to devour a hen that lay on his plate roasted and stuffed. A tall stein stood next to the succulent fowl, its rim flowing with cold brew. All of a sudden the man picked up the entire hen and stuffed it into his mouth. He washed down his meal with a giant gulp of beer, leaving the stein nearly empty. The Chofetz Chaim had never seen a Jewish person eat like that, let alone without a bracha (blessing before food)!

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

"Oh!" smirked the host while waving his hand in disgust. "There's nobody to talk to. This young man never learned a day in his life. The cantonists captured him when he was eleven and he served in the Russian army for 15 years. He hardly observes any mitzvos. It's amazing that he even eats kosher!" Then he smiled. "But I'm sure I can count on him for a three-course meal every Thursday night!"

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

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

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

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

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

It is easy to enumerate your friend's misdeeds – and perhaps even easier to tell him off. But, that is not the goal.

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

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

Good Shabbos!

May a Husband Give His Wife Supportive Touch During Childbirth? – Part 2*

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2018, 2020

May a husband hold his wife's hand or give her a massage during childbirth, according to halakhah? We began to answer this question last week* and came to the following interim conclusions:

1. A pregnant woman is not considered to be in niddah until either she experiences uterine bleeding (distinct from mere stains), or until a limb of the baby emerges from the womb. Prior to this time, all forms of touch are permitted.

2. During childbirth, a woman is in the halakhic category of a person whose life is at risk, and Torah prohibitions, including Shabbat violations, may be transgressed for her sake. This includes anything done for the sake of her peace of mind.

It would seem, then, that during childbirth, even when she is in niddah, her husband should be permitted to give her a massage if she requests it, or even if he just senses that it would be helpful for her state of mind. And yet, a number of poskim forbid this. On what basis do they make such a claim?

The point of departure of this restrictive position is the ruling Rav Yosef Karo in Shulkhan Arukh (YD 195:16-17) that prohibits all touch, even medical in nature:

> *If a woman is sick, and she is in niddah, it is forbidden for her husband to touch her in order to tend to her needs, for example, to help her get in or out of bed. If her husband is a doctor, it is forbidden for him to take her pulse.*

Rema, in contrast, states that such touch is permissible when necessary:

> *But some say that if she has no one else to attend to her, it is all permitted. And this is our practice, if she is in great need of this… It is thus certainly permissible for him to take her pulse when there is no other doctor, if she needs him to do so, and if there are risks attendant with her illness.*

What is this debate about, and why should physical touch be so much stricter – at least for Rav Yosef Karo – than everything else?

To better understand this, we must turn to a number of verses in this week's parashah. In its list of forbidden sexual acts, the Torah forbids a man to have intercourse with his wife when she is in niddah (Vayirka 18:20). The punishment for this sin is karet, divine excision (20:18), the same as for many of the other forbidden sexual acts.

The simple sense of these verses is that while in niddah only intercourse is Biblically forbidden. The Talmud, as well, seems to treat all cases of sexual touch as rabbinic, and not Biblical, violations.[1] Based on this, Ramban argues strongly that any sexual act or touch that falls short of actual intercourse would only be prohibited on a rabbinic level.[2]

Rambam complicates this picture. He states that sexual touch is indeed Biblically forbidden. He points out that while the Torah refers to intercourse when discussion the punishment of karet, it uses a different phrase when prohibiting the act. The prohibiting verse states: "And unto a woman who is in her menstrual impurity, you shall not draw near, to reveal her nakedness." (18:20). This difference in formulation, for Rambam, indicates that although only intercourse is punishable by karet, all forms of sexual touch – anything that can be defined as a "drawing near to reveal her nakedness" – are Biblically forbidden.

In support of his position, Rambam cites a passage from Sifra,[3] the Tannaitic halakhic midrash on Vayikra, that reads the verse in this broader way. Ramban rejects this, stating that the Sifra might be merely an asmakhta (a Biblical support for a Rabbinic law), and regardless, it is against the authoritative position of the Babylonian Talmud, and thus must be rejected.

[As an aside, it is worth noting that in three places Rambam rules that certain sexual acts are Biblically prohibited based on passages from Sifra and against the simple meaning of the Babylonian Talmud: (1) sexual touch that is not intercourse; (2) pre-marital intercourse;[4] and (3) sex between two women.[5] Interestingly, the verses relevant to these prohibitions all appear in our parashah (18:20, 19:29 and 18:3).]

Poskim debate whether the halakhah follows Rambam or Ramban.[6] It is clear, however, that touch that is neutral and non-sexual would at most be a rabbinic violation, even for Rambam.[7] What, for Rambam, is the line between sexual and non-sexual touch? Rambam answers this question differently in different places. In his short list of the mitzvot he includes even acts that involve no physical contact, such as "beckoning and hinting," since these acts could eventually lead to intercourse. In contrast, in Sefer HaMitzvot (Lo Ta'asei, 353), he limits this prohibition to "fondling (or "hugging"), kissing, and similar lustful acts."

In his authoritative Mishneh Torah (Issurei Biah 21:1), Rambam defines this category quite narrowly. He states that the Torah forbids: "intercourse by 'way of limbs' (e.g., oral or manual), or fondling or kissing in a lustful way, deriving sexual pleasure through the bodily contact… acts that bring about sexual intercourse." Only acts that are highly sexual and sensory in nature, and also are an immediate precursor to intercourse, are included. Thus, Rav Henkin rules that the only touch that is Biblically prohibited from Rambam is the type of sexual touch that takes place "during intercourse and as a lead-in to it."[8] While other poskim define "sexual touch" much more broadly, they do so without reference to Rambam's own definition. It is clear to me that Rav Henkin's position is the correct one.[9]

Let us now return to Shulkhan Arukh and Rema's ruling regarding a husband assisting his sick wife. We saw that Shulkhan Arukh forbade the husband to help his wife get in and out of bed, or take her pulse. From Rav Yosef Karo's discussion in Beit Yosef, it seems that his intent is to forbid this even if his wife is suffering from a life-threatening illness, although some poskim argue that he would permit such a case.

The only way to explain Shulkhan Arukh's stance is to state that for Shulkhan Arukh we are dealing with touch that is considered a sexual sin. As such, one would not be permitted to transgress it to save a life, since one must be prepared to die rather than to transgress the weighty sexual sins (giluy arayot).[10]

Why is this neutral touch a sexual sin? It is possible that for Shulkhan Arukh even non-sexual touch is a Biblical violation, but this is not supported by any source, even Rambam. And Shulkhan Arukh permits another man to help her, which would not make sense if there were a problem with neutral touch. It seems, rather, that Shulkhan Arukh believes that her husband's touch will always have some sexual undertone to it, or will likely lead to sex, and it is this that defines it as a Biblical violation. However, as we saw above, Rambam's actual position is that only blatantly sexual touch would fall into this category. [11]

Finally, it is clear from an earlier ruling of Shulkhan Arukh (YD 195:15), that when there is no serious concern that the touch will lead to intercourse, even Shulkhan Arukh would permit it.

In consideration of all of the above, even Rav Ovadya Yosef, who normally never sways from the rulings of Shulkhan Arukh, here rules that a husband can assist his wife who is in niddah if she has a serious illness, although he prefers avoiding direct contact when possible.

For Rema, and thus for Ashkenazim, the matter is even more straightforward. Rema rules that a husband can help his wife in such situations of serious illness when no other person can provide similar assistance.

When it comes to a man holding his wife's hand or giving her a massage during childbirth, we are dealing with a situation of a life-threatening condition, as discussed last week. If the wife prefers that her husband be the one to give her the massage, then he is doing something that no one else can do – giving her the comfort that his touch uniquely provides for her. Some have argued that the fact that she wants her husband specifically to be the one to do it shows that the touch is not neutral, and hence sexual, and thus a Biblical violation. This is clearly incorrect. A spouse's touch can be comforting, intimate, and calming without being sexual. This is true even in the case of a massage provided during childbirth; such touch is not lustful or blatantly sexual in any way. And the concern that in this situation such touch will lead to intercourse is minimal to non-existent. Thus, in a similar case, Rav Ovadya Yosef rules that a husband is permitted to rub a medicinal salve into his wife's skin, even in her private areas, as such touch is non-sexual and will not lead to intercourse.

IN CONCLUSION: When a woman is in childbirth, even once she is in niddah, her husband may hold her hand or give her a massage, if she requests or would prefer that he be the one to so. She is in a life-threatening condition, and prohibitions may be overridden to help provide her peace of mind.

Shabbat Shalom!

FOOTNOTES:

[1] See, for example, Shabbat 13a and Yevamot 55b

[2] Hasagot Sefer HaMitzvot, Lo Ta'aseh 553

[3] Aharei Mot, parashah 9

[4] Ishut 1:4 based on Sifra Kedoshim, parashah 3 and against Yevamot 61b, and see Ramban, Hasagaot Sefer HaMitzvot, shoresh 5

[5] Issurei Biah 21:8 loosely based on Sifra Aharei Mot, parashah 8, and against Yevamot 76a

[6] see SA EH 20:1, Helkat Mehokek, ad. loc., and Shakh, YD 157:10

[7] see Shakh, YD 157:10 and 195:20

[8] Shut Benei Banim 1:37, sec. 7. And see Ramban, Hasagot, Lo Ta'aseh 353, who states that Sifra was only referring to cases where the man and woman are lying together naked.

[9] For further discussion, see Shut Pnei Yehoshua, 42, and Rav Ovadya Yosef's Torat HaBayit, ch. 12, footnote 46.

[10] Although it is debated if niddah falls into this category, see Shut Pnei Yehoshua, 42.

[11] A point made by Shakh YD 195:20. It is possible that Shulkhan Arukh rules as he does because he believes that one must be prepared to die even for rabbinic violations of sexual sins (based on Sanhedrin 75a). While there are some who adopt this position, it is a highly debated and questionable one (see discussion in Taharat HaBayit, 12:46).

* Part 1: https://library.yctorah.org/2018/04/may-a-husband-give-his-wife-supportive-touch-during-childbirth-part-1/

Acharei Mot - Kedoshim -- In the After Math

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine ©2020 Teach 613

The death of Ahron's two sons hit the people very hard. It happened on inauguration day of the Mishkan, the Sanctuary they had dedicated so much to build. The Mishkan was supposed to be a "Love Palace" between G-d and the people. Now, two noble sons were slain by Him. The people were in shock.

Our Parsha continues the story by telling us that the Kohein Gadol (high priest) was invited to come into the Holy of Holies one day a year, as an emissary of the people. As the Torah describes the formula for this special audience one theme is clear: Hashem still loves the Jewish people even if there was a reason for Him to bring upon them the great tragedy that had just occurred. Certainly, lessons would be learned from the occurrence. Ahron was instructed (in Parshas Shmini) that his service is not compatible with alcoholic beverages. (One of the things his sons did wrong was to do the service while intoxicated.) Likewise, Aharon is instructed that he cannot enter this special audience with Hashem without following the protocol described. (His sons had brought their offering "without being directed to.") Ultimately, the message of this Parsha is that despite the tragedy- and whatever lessons there may be- Hashem still loves you and His relationship with you will still thrive to great heights.

Often a person, when faced with troubles, may think that Hashem is distant or has abandoned him or her. This is not a proper, Jewish, conclusion. Great and righteous people also have to deal with "things." Sarah was barren for decades despite her best efforts. Likewise, Chana's prayers were not initially accepted. One cannot read "troubles" as meaning that Hashem is no longer in touch. Instead, the Torah introduces the service of the "holiest day of the year," the day of Yom Kippur, immediately "after the death of Ahron's two sons," to make it clear that despite the tragedy, Hashem is still loving and close.

This is perhaps the emotional and philosophical challenge which Amaleik wanted to introduce. While the Jewish people were on a high from the Exodus, thinking that they were "at one" with Hashem, Amaleik attacked. In doing so they attempted the ruin the impression that the Jews had of their relationship with Hashem. Amoleik wanted the Jews to think, "If we are vulnerable to attack, does that mean that Hashem doesn't really love us?!" "Do the Math," Amoleik could easily argue quite rationally. "Just as 1 + 1 = 2, so if you are attacked while you claim to be so beloved, you apparently are not so beloved." Moshe's response of prayer (Shimos 17:10; Talmud Rosh Hashana 29a) contains a most powerful message. Challenge doesn't mean Hashem doesn't like us. It does mean that something needs to be addressed. But even as we do, we direct our prayers to Him for guidance and salvation.

I have often thought that this is the message of placing the Aravos by the Aron in shul (at least for a few moments) after we have beaten them on Hoshana Rabboh. We have completed the High Holiday Service hoping to inaugurate a "sweet new year." But we know that there are no guarantees. Hashem runs His world as He sees fit. So we bang the Aravos and then place them next to Hashem. In doing so we are saying, "Even if you bang me up, I'm not going anywhere else." "You are stuck with me," the Jew says, "please accept my prayers favorably."

In our current situation dealing with coronavirus I believe this message can hearten us. As Iyov (13:15) says, "Even in tragedy, I hope to Hashem." We recognize that Hashem runs the world, and that difficulty comes from Him. Yet, we also recognize that Hashem loves us, and that He remains our address for prayer and hope.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word "Lo- to" which is used in that verse in Iyov is written with an Alef, which makes the word mean "No," as if to say, "It seems, at face value, that in crisis, I have no more hope." But our tradition, which captures the essence of the Jewish attitude states that it is correctly understood as if it said it with a Vuv, meaning "I do hope to Hashem." Appearances and estimates (the written text) is that the human being will lose hope in the face of adversity. But the truth (the oral tradition) is that we increase our hope to Him at this time.

As we consider Ahron and the mind-frame that he could easily have been in after the tragedy, the message of the Torah becomes that much more meaningful. Despite the loss, despite the tragedy, we know that Hashem loves us, and we continue to hope and pray to Him. The sun still rises, even when there are concerns, and the relationship is still active even as we experience disappointments.

May Hashem bless us with the removal of this illness. May He grant speedy recovery to those afflicted, and protect us all with good health, serenity, and happiness.

With all blessings,

Kedoshim: My Favorite Dvar Torah

By Rabbi Moshe Rube
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I've heard lots of Dvar Torah's throughout my life of all shapes, sizes, and colors. Intellectual, emotional, heartfelt, scholarly, yeshivishe, spiritual, chassidic, academic, integrative, scientific, you name it.

But today, I'm going to tell you my favorite one, or one of my favorites. Just like we stammer when we're asked our "favorite" song, it's hard to choose the one that we adore the most. There are just too many different criteria by which to judge.

But this is the one that has had the most staying power in my life. I heard it from my 9th grade Rebbe and it has stayed with me ever since. Other Dvar Torahs I've heard over the past fifteen years have gone in my ear and made a nice little cabin in the deep recesses of my memory but this one has always been at the tip of my tongue whenever someone asks me to tell them a little Torah about anything Jewish. I probably have said it already to a few people here.

So now that I've hyped it up. Let's begin.

Our parsha of Kedoshim this week contains the eponymous phrase "Viahavta Lirayacha Kamocha" You shall love your neighbor like yourself. We have all heard this phrase many times from rallies, songs, and just about every rabbi from across the spectrum who mention it at least twenty times throughout the year in sermons. Many of us are familiar with the Talmudic story of Hillel who told a potential convert that the rest of the Torah was simply a commentary on this one phrase.

And usually we take it at face value. Love your neighbor like yourself. Just like you love yourself, love other people. Love your family, love your community, love all of humankind like you love yourself. Yes, I know there are people who sadly are self-hating, but in general we all tend to care deeply about our well being more than others and the Torah tells us to take other people's well being seriously as well. Treat others how you would want to be treated. The Golden Rule.

It's a beautiful sentiment and we all choke up as we think about this ideal that we hope humanity adopts. (Feel free to stop reading now if you're totally satisfied with this interpretation.)

And yet, there's an added depth to this phrase that while not denying the Golden Rule, causes us to traverse from abstract ideal into the realities of our life experience.

Rabbi Meir Dan Polotzki, a Polish Rav (d.1928) and author of the work Klay Chemdah on the Torah, asks what the Torah means when it says "Love your neighbor like yourself". How is it possible to love someone else just like ourselves? We are hardwired and encouraged to make sure we're safe and on our feet before we can take care of others. To put it another way, the Halacha discourages giving charity if we cannot afford it. But if we love others like ourselves then we should give fifty percent of our money away no matter what.

Would you not want to be treated that way? If someone would give an incredible amount of their time and money to us would we not appreciate it? So according to the Golden Rule, you should do that for all people in your life. But we know that the Torah doesn't demand such a standard from us. What's going on here? What does this phrase actually mean?

To answer this, we give a parable. When we fall to the ground, we naturally stick our hands out to cushion the fall. We protect our head and torso from hitting the ground as much as possible.

Why do we do this? Why do we cause our hands to be scratched so that other body parts can emerge unscathed? Because we know that some parts of our body are more important than others. God forbid we should ever need it, but if one of our limbs was causing damage to the rest of our body, we would be more willing to part with it than having our head amputated if there was a problem up there.

This is how we love ourselves. We do not love all that is us in the same way. We value our heads more than our hands and our heart more than our feet and our lungs more than our digestive tracts. (That last one may be a little more gray area but I think you get the picture.)

Rabbi Meir Dan explains that just like we place value and love different parts of ourselves in different ways, so too is it with people. Not every person in our life can we give the maximum amount of our love and attention. We simply don't have enough waking hours.

Some people are the "heads" of our lives like our spouses. Then the rest of our family followed by our synagogues, communities, the world, all of existence and so on and so forth. We decide who is important in our lives and who deserves our most love and attention.

With this in mind, an "act of love" can become immoral. Say you volunteer at the homeless shelter 3 nights a week for the sake of loving your neighbor. But while doing that, you miss being home for your kids or your spouse who needs you. Suppose you give a lot of charity to Israel, but give less to your own cousin who's struggling financially. Charirty after all, begins at home.

We love our neighbors like ourselves. That means we decide what and who occupies which position in our lives and plan our time accordingly. Defining our values, our lives and how we give of ourselves is tough but this is what the Torah wants from us.

The Golden Rule is still there. The abstract love for everyone on earth remains nestled in our consciousness and colors our daily interactions and mindsets. When applying it to our real lives though where we cannot and should not take care of everyone in the same way, we must hear this other message of "Viahavta Lirayacha Kamocha".

And it can be tough. Sometimes we may even need to set strict boundaries with people who are bad for us. The mitzvah to love our neighbor like ourselves demands this too. We love ourselves by getting rid of character traits or experiences that bring us down. So too this can apply to other people.

It's tough. It's gritty. It requires us to wade through life's complexities and define who we are and which people occupy which position in our lives. It's much easier to just think of this mitzvah in the idealistic sense.

But this is probably why I like this Dvar torah so much. Because it gives the best of both worlds. It shows that hidden within "Viahavta Lirayacha Kamocha" is not only the idyllic vision of worldwide peace, but also a sober realization of the work required to truly understand who we are, what we want and what others mean to us. Not for nothing did Hillel say that if you can understand this idyllic vision and also how to work with yourself and your varied relationships to God and humanity will you understand the whole Torah.

Other Dvar Torahs only focus on one aspect but this one has it all and encapsulates it in of our most famous phrases.

That's a rare find but now it's yours to keep too.

Shabbat Shalom!

* We joined KI when our son Evan was in medical school at the university of Alabama in Birmingham. This remarkable shul, with a great history, is a treasure in the South, and Rabbi Rube is a truly outstanding Rabbi of the young generation.

Rav Kook Torah
Acharei Mot - Kedoshim: Sha'atnez - A Glimpse into the Future

While first introduced here in Lev. 19:19, the prohibition of sha'atnez is more clearly defined later on in the Torah: "Do not wear sha'atnez — wool and linen together" (Deut. 22:11). Why does the Torah prohibit using wool and linen in the same article of clothing?

Also, the special garments of High Priest contained both wool and linen. Why was he allowed to wear sha'atnez?

Chok — for the Future

These two materials — linen, from the flax plant, and wool, shorn from sheep — were the two major fibers available to ancient civilizations. According to one opinion in the Talmud (Shabbat 26b), whenever the Torah speaks of garments without specifying the material, it only refers to garments of wool or linen.

The Torah's prohibition of wearing linen and wool together is a prime example of a chok, a decree for which we do not know the reason. As Rashi wrote, the nations of the world and the evil inclination taunt us, saying, "What is this command? What logic is there to it?"

According to Rav Kook, it is not that a chok has no reason, or no reason that we are capable of grasping. Rather, this category of mitzvot belongs to a future reality that is different from our own. At that future time, the purpose of these decrees will become clear.

In other words, these mitzvot serve to morally prepare us for the future.

One intriguing view of the future is the idea expressed by the Kabbalists that the future elevation of the universe will also include a radical change in the animals. Animals will develop into a state similar to the current level of human beings. This belief plays a central role in Rav Kook's writings in many areas: vegetarianism, Temple sacrifices, and understanding decrees such as sha'atnez and not eating milk and meat together.

The use of linen from the flax plant does not raise any moral dilemmas. But the use of wool necessitates a mild censure from the standpoint of absolute morality:

"Man, in his boundless egocentricity, approaches the poor cow and sheep. From one he seizes its milk, and from the other, its fleece.... There would be no impropriety in taking the wool were the sheep burdened by its load; but we remove the wool when its natural owner needs it. Intellectually, we recognize that this is a form of theft — oppression of the weak at the hands of the strong. (Otzarot HaRe'iyah vol. II, p. 97)

Of course, the moral offense applies primarily with regard to the future state of sheep.

In order to distinguish between the use of wool and linen, and instill a sensitivity towards animal welfare that we will need in future times, the Torah decreed that these two fibers should not be worn together. Utilization of the flax plant and manipulation of sheep are not — in absolute terms — morally equivalent.

All of this is true when the wool is used for private consumption. But if the wool is designated for Divine service — as in the clothes of the High Priest — then the principle of bechol me'odecha, serving God with all of our possessions, takes force. Here it is appropriate that, out of their own free will, the animals will contribute their part for the sake of the universe's spiritual elevation.

Why Only Linen?
A student once asked Rav Kook why, according to this explanation, the Torah only forbids linen together with wool, but not other fibers (such as cotton) together with wool.

Rav Kook answered that mitzvot are like words. Through these words, we can discern the Torah's fundamental teachings. If one word is sufficient to convey the message, there is no need for another word to teach the very same concept.

However, the word chosen should be the best and most lucid. The message of concern for animal welfare needs to be ingrained in the minds of society's leaders. Therefore, the Torah chose to express this message through linen, the fiber favored for respectable and elegant clothing in olden times. Fibers such as cotton are used for purely utilitarian purposes. Linen best symbolizes our desire to clothe ourselves in dignity and honor; thus, it is the best medium to express the need for human sensitivity towards animals.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. I, p. 104.)

The Tragic History of Molech Child Sacrifice

By Levi Avtzon* © 2020

In biblical times there were numerous false gods that were popular in the ancient pagan societies, and, at times, among the Jewish people as well. Throughout the Tanach, there are many references to a rite named Molech, which involved passing children through fire, with many warnings from G d to not observe it.

The Prohibition

The first we hear of it is in the portion of Acharei Mot: "And you shall not give any of your offspring to pass through for Molech. And you shall not profane the Name of your G d. I am the L rd."1

In the portion of Kedoshim we read about the consequences of such an action:

> *And to the children of Israel, you shall say: Any man of the children of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among Israel, who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall pelt him with stones.*
>
> *And I will set My attention upon that man, and I will cut him off from amidst his people, because he gave of his offspring to Molech in order to defile My holy ones and to profane My holy Name.*
>
> *But if the people of the land ignore that man when he gives of his offspring to Molech, not putting him to death.*
>
> *I will set My attention upon that man, and upon his family, and I will cut him off, and all who stray after him to stray after Molech, from amidst their people.*

And yet once again in Deuteronomy, in the portion of Shoftim: "There shall not be found among you anyone who passes his son or daughter through fire [Rashi: this was the unique service of the Molech], a soothsayer, a diviner of [auspicious] times, one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer . . ."2

Maimonides counts the prohibition of passing one's child through Molech as negative commandment #7 out of 365.

What Was Molech?

Clearly, the Molech attraction was quite intense to have the demerit of so many mentions in the Torah. So, what do we know about this idolatry?

Let us begin with the Talmud.3 We read in the Mishnah: "One who gives of his offspring to Molech is not liable [to be stoned] unless he hands over [the child] to the priests of Molech and passes the child through the fire."

The Gemara provides two traditions regarding the actual ritual: According to Abaye, the child would walk on a raised brick walkway between two fires.

According to Rava, the child would be made to leap over a fire burning in a pit (similar to how children would amuse themselves on Purim).

Rashi, in his commentary on the Torah, adopts the opinion of Abaye: "This was a form of idolatry, named Molech, and this was the manner of its worship, that one would hand over one's child to the pagan priests, who would make two huge fires. The child was then passed through on foot between these two fires."4

Nachmanides, quoting the Jerusalem Talmud,5 argues that the service included the father himself passing his child through the fire!6 Maimonides concurs with this opinion.7

The Midrash8 elaborates on this disturbing service:

> *How did the Molech work in the valley of Ben-Hinnom? It was built outside of Jerusalem. It was an idol with the face of a calf and open hands like someone who wants to take something from another. They would light this idol on fire until his hands were scorching. There were seven chambers before him and according to the quality of the sacrifice that is how close one could come to him. If one came with a bird, then chamber one; goat, chamber two; sheep, chamber three; calf, chamber four; cow, chamber five; and ox, chamber six.*
>
> *He who brought his child, the priests would say that he is offering the greatest sacrifice. He would enter the innermost chamber and go kiss the Molech . . .*
>
> *The priests would then take the child and place it near the Molech. They would then bang with drums to drown out the cries.*
>
> *. . Come see how obsessed the nation was with idol worship that they were willing to do something so reprehensible! But in the future, says G d, "I will remove your heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh."9*

Did the Child Die?

While the Midrashic tradition cited above states that the child died during the service, not all agree that this happened.

Maimonides argues this was a service which the child survived (albeit emotionally scarred for life).10 Other opinions, however, say that the child was actually scarred physically or even burned to death!11 The priests would bang and clap to drown the noise from the child's screams so that the father would not regret his decision.

Whoa! Why would anyone in his right mind find such a service attractive for his own children?

Maimonides tells us that the conniving priests of Molech convinced people that whoever did not have their children participate in this ritual would witness the death of their children.12 Thus, people felt that by appeasing the Molech god they would secure their child's future.13

Was It Really Practiced?

The Book of Kings tells us of Solomon's many foreign wives and their impact on him.

Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, on the mountain that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.14

King Solomon actually built a site for Molech?

Says Rashi:15 "Our Rabbis said, since he did not protest against his wives, it is referred to on his name." Solomon didn't build the temples but he remained quiet in the face of his wives' deviant behavior.

We also read of an evil king named Ahaz:

> *Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king, and he reigned 16 years in Jerusalem, and he did not do what was proper in the eyes of the L rd his G d like David his antecedent.*
>
> *He went in the ways of the kings of Israel, and he also passed his son through fire in the abominable manner of the nations whom the L rd had driven out from before the children of Israel.16*

And then there was King Menashe: "And he passed his sons through fire in the valley of Ben Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, divination, and sorcery, and he consulted necromancers and those who divine by the jidoa bone; he did much that was evil in the eyes of the L rd, to provoke Him."17
In the book of Jeremiah we read that G d said: "And they have built the high places of Topheth which are in the valley of Ben- Hinnom, to burn their sons and daughters with fire, which I did not ordain, neither did it enter My mind."18

The Relevance

The rabbis ask why the prohibition of Molech in the Torah follows the prohibitions of unkosher sexual relationships. They offer several insightful answers:

Menachem ben Benjamin Recanati19 proposes that both sins reflect a reneging on relationship vows. Idolatry is unfaithfulness to the pact we made with G d at Sinai.20

The Abarbanel21 offers two answers:

1. *The people of Canaan were morally derelict, specifically in these two sins.*

2. *Just as sexual promiscuity is the abuse of the procreative power, so too the passing (and killing) of one's child through fire is the abuse of the divine gift for procreating children.*

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch22 opines that the link between the two is that "one's children are not born from blind bodily lust but were rather born inherently free. So too in their lives, they should not be subservient to blind luck and destiny which befalls them. After all, their conception and birth were by Divine Guidance and Providence, and therefore they should lead a purposeful life… "Give Me your children – says G d – let Me educate them, allow Me to bring each one of them to their ultimate potential in their unique way. Don't give them over to Molech and thereby desecrate My name!"

The take-home message from this disturbing history lesson is that we must cherish our children and our responsibility towards them. Young children are dependent upon adults, and it is the adults' obligation to take that task seriously and never abuse the naivete and trust of young children. We are called upon to watch over and protect G d's magnificent children.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 18:21.

2. Deuteronomy 18:10.

3. Sanhedrin 64b.

4. Rashi on Leviticus 18:21.

5. Sanhedrin 7:10.

6. Leviticus 18:21.

7. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Avoda Zara 6:3.

8. Tanchuma (Buber) addition to Va'etchanan, section 2.

9. Ezekiel 36:26.

10. Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Avoda Zara 6:3, and commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 7:7.

11. Nachmanides on Leviticus 18:21; Rashi on Jeremiah 7:31; and Radak on II Kings 23:10.

12. Guide for the Perplexed 3:37.

13. This argument can only work according to Maimonides' own opinion that the child didn't die during the ritual.

14. I Kings 7:11.

15. On the verse I Kings 7:11.

16. II Kings 16:3.

17. II Chronicles 33:6.

18. Jeremiah 7:31.

19. In his commentary 'Recanati' on the Leviticus 18:21.

20. This answer does not address Molech specifically, but rather the general concept of idolatry.

21. On Leviticus 18.

22. On Leviticus 18:21.

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Acharei Mot - Kedoshim: The Benefit of the Doubt

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky*

G-d instructed Moses to tell the Jewish people, "You must judge your fellow righteousness." (Vayikra 19:15)

Our Sages exhort us to "be extremely humble in relation to every person," i.e., to consider ourselves less worthy than anyone else. Yet, objectively speaking, how can we consider ourselves less meritorious than those who appear to be unworthy of our respect?

The answer is by keeping in mind the Sages' teaching: "Do not judge your fellow until you reach his place." In other words, we all have challenges; the fact that we do not succumb to a particular temptation while another person does, does not make us superior to him. Who can measure the effect of his upbringing, environment, or inborn character weakness against the temptation he faces?

By judging our fellows favorable -- or better yet, by not judging them at all -- we can both cultivate our own humility more effectively and allow our fellows' positive traits to manifest themselves unhindered.

From Kehot's **Daily Wisdom #2**

* An insight from the Rebbe.

With heartfelt wishes for a healthy Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Ethic of Holiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prophetic morality looks at the quality of relationships within a society, between us and God and between us and our fellow humans. Here are some of the key texts that define this morality. God says about Abraham, "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right [tzedakah] and just [mishpat]."[3] God tells Hosea, "I will betroth you to Me in righteousness [tzedek] and justice [mishpat], in kindness [chessed] and compassion [rachamim]."[4] He tells Jeremiah, "I am the Lord, who exercises kindness [chessed], justice [mishpat] and righteousness [tzedakah] on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord."[5] Those are the key prophetic words: righteousness, justice, kindness and compassion – not love.

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

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

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

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

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

Note: *Since currently there is no need to pay for duplication of hard copies of LDT, the sponsorship cost is reduced to $25. Funds raised by sponsorships will be donated to the organizations from which the articles are drawn.* SG, *Compiler*

applies not just to Priests but to the entire nation. We, too, must to be distinctive, set apart, held to a higher standard.

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

There is one other place in which b-d-l is a key word, namely the story of creation in Genesis 1, where it occurs five times. God separates light and dark, day and night, upper and lower waters. For three days God demarcates different domains, then for the next three days He places in each its appropriate objects or life-forms. God fashions order out of the tohu va-vohu of chaos. As His last act of creation, He makes man after His "image and likeness." This was clearly an act of love. "Beloved is man," said Rabbi Akiva, "because he was created in [God's] image."[6]

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And you shall observe My decrees and My laws which a human being shall perform and he shall live by them; I am the Lord." (Lev. 18:5)

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

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

Even the famous test of Abraham, the apparent Divine command that Abraham sacrifice his son to Him, concludes with Abraham being forbidden to harm his son (Kierkegaard notwithstanding). The most classic commentary, Rashi, even goes so far as to say that Abraham misunderstood the Divine command, that God never meant that he should slaughter his son, but rather dedicate him in life and not in death.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

V'Chai Bohem

Torah Web Editor's note: What follows is a free translation of a Hebrew essay originally published by Rav Mayer Twersky shlit"a on TorahWeb.org on April 22, 2020. We (some of Rav Twersky's students) requested to attempt a rendering of the body of the essay in English; Rav Twersky agreed, but was not

directly involved in the preparation of this translation. Our hope is that our efforts will somewhat convey and capture the substance and voice of the original.

Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 2:3) writes: Furthermore, it is forbidden to delay such violation of the Sabbath for the sake of a person who is dangerously ill, for Scripture says: "Which if a man do, he shall live by them" (Lev. 18:5), that is to say, he shall not die by them (Sanhedrin 74b). Hence you learn that the ordinances of the Law were meant to bring upon the world not vengeance, but mercy, lovingkindness, and peace. It is of heretics - who assert that this is nevertheless a violation of the Sabbath and therefore prohibited - that Scripture says, "Wherefore I gave them also statues that were not good, and ordinances whereby they should not live" (Yechezkel 20:25).[1]

In our family, we have a tradition regarding the following story: When Rav Chaim Soloveitchik's oldest grandson (the Rav, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik) was an infant, he became gravely ill and the doctor came to examine him on Shabbos. During the examination, Rav Chaim asked the doctor if he needed more light. The doctor, neither accepting or dismissing Rav Chaim's offer, replied, "nu, nu." Immediately, Rav Chaim instructed the family member who was standing closest to the fire to tend to the fire to provide more light. The family member, however, was deterred by the doctor's neutral answer, and did not immediately comply with Rav Chaim's directive. Rav Chaim excoriated him: "du bist a am ha'aretz un an apikores -- you are an am ha'aretz (ignoramus) and an apikores (heretic)!" Rav Simcha Zelig Rieger, who was also present, then hastened to fulfill Rav Chaim's directive.

This story is both awesome and instructive; per Rav Chaim, Rambam's designation -- apikores!-- includes even one who subscribes axiomatically to the preeminence of pikuach nefesh, but is remiss in acting commensurately. After all, of what value is one's nominal belief if he does not act accordingly?

The Rav's penetrating exposition is crucial to appreciating the full ramifications of Rambam's formulation: "The saving of a life overrides the commandments of the entire Torah; and he shall live by them and not die by them. Desecrate one Sabbath on his account that he may keep many Sabbaths" [Yoma 85b]. This law is the watchword of Judaism. "An authority who allows himself to be consulted [when a life is in danger] is reprehensible, and he who consults him (rather than speedily acting to save the life in danger) is a murderer" (Tur, Orah Hayyim 328). Maimonides, that master of conciseness, deviated from his regular manner and treated this issue with great elaborateness... [Rav Soloveitchik, in the original, inserts the previous citation of Rambam.]

The teachings of the Torah do not oppose the laws of life and reality, for were they to clash with this world and were they to negate the value of concrete, physiological-biological existence, then they would contain not mercy, lovingkindness, and peace but vengeance and wrath.[2]

One who makes light of the mandate of pikuach nefesh is not only making light of one isolated halacha. Rather, he is guilty of distorting and perverting the entire Torah. His flippancy depicts the laws of the Torah not, r"l, as "merciful, kind and just," but as vengeful and vicious. It goes without saying that such a distortion constitutes a chillul Hashem.

I write the following without pretensions; I know all too well that I am sorely lacking in Torah, yirah, and ma'asim tovim, and am wholly unqualified to address -- or take a stance on -- issues which are the province of Gedolei Torah. Chazal, however, adduce a clear halachic mandate from the pasuk in Mishlei (21:30), "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan against Hashem" that "in a situation of chillul Hashem, we do not defer (our attempts to redress the chillul Hashem) out of respect for the rav" (Sanhedrin 82a). Even one as lowly and insignificant as myself is still sensitive to, and pained by, the chillul Hashem which occurred recently as a result of the heretical (per Rav Chaim) flippancy regarding the dictates of pikuach nefesh, and, ipso facto, the concomitant distortion of Torah itself.

When the doctors with relevant expertise -- some of whom are observant, God-fearing Jews -- alerted us to the dangers of this extremely contagious, frightening disease, their warnings initially went unheeded, and we did not all immediately listen to their pleading. Baruch Hashem, we did merit that some gedolim and other rabbonim of stature acted to enforce social distancing with all due haste. It is, however, a matter of public knowledge that many prominent, leading rabbonim did not act in this manner. To compound matters, even when we belatedly heeded the calls for social distancing and isolation, we then characterized our compliance with these measures -- regretfully!-- as a concession to outside entities instead of our complying with the mandate of pikuach nefesh. This (mis)characterization of our motives also caused distortion and perversion of the Torah.

Moreover, mischaracterizing our compliance with social distancing as a mere capitulation to the standards of outside entities had significant practical ramifications. The standards of all outside entities do not value life as absolutely as does the Torah. Tosafos (Yoma 85a) comment, "'You shall live through them and not die due to them' [means] that we must under no circumstances allow for the death of a Jewish person."Woe is to the eyes that saw, the ears that heard, what transpired in our midst. How can it be that others recognized the reality and hastened to save lives, while some of us were avoidant and resistant? How is it that some of us eventually had to be compelled by others to fulfill the Torah's mandate of "v'chai bohem?" Isn't our charge "lishmor v'la'asos -- to guard and carry out" mitzvos? What of the Torah's depiction of a universal recognition (an organic result of scrupulous performance of, and fealty to, the mitzvos) that Hashem's nation is a wise and discerning one, am chacham v'navon? This, too, has intensified the chillul Hashem. In addition to a perversion of Hashem's Torah, there has been a perversion of the image of Hashem's nation.

While nothing else compares to the gravity of chillul Hashem, we must not ignore other severe consequences of our failures on this front. The chillul Hashem stemmed from the flippant attitude adopted to an immense danger to life. Who can possibly measure the dreadful ramifications of this attitude? Only God Himself can truly know.

At this juncture, our obligation is twofold. We must mend -- to the extent that such is possible -- the mistakes of the past, while simultaneously, prospectively, charting a communal path which accords with the authentic Torah position.

Regarding the past mistakes, we are obligated to publicly declare our guilt in having been willingly blind and deaf to the manifest reality and being shockingly flippant about the immense danger posed by that very reality. As for the future, we must emphasize -- clearly and decisively -- that the Torah demands our absolute alacrity in the face of danger to life. We must not look for pro forma loopholes or so-called solutions which --at best-- may mitigate, but certainly will not eliminate, the dangers of this disease. The Torah absolutely condemns and forbids acting in a way which - under any circumstances - may allow for the death of a Jew.

If we take these steps, perhaps we can demonstrate to the world that our previous intransigence, opposition, and tarrying in the face of mortal danger is not the derech haTorah, but that the laws of the Torah are merciful, kind, and just, and that we, Hashem's nation, the sheep of His flock, are in fact truly wise and discerning.

May Hashem, in His great mercy, pity and save us speedily in the very near future.

[1] Translation adapted from A Maimonides Reader.
[2] Halakhic Man, p. 34

OTS Dvar Torah

How Much to Reproach?
Rabbi David Brofsky

We are responsible for each other and can't remain aloof to the deviant and harmful things happening around us. How, though, are we to observe the commandment of rebuking others without offending them?

Parashat Kedoshim covers a series of commandments touching upon all facets of our lives. In this parasha, we find passages dealing with our encounters with people who behave differently than us. The Torah cautions us against despising others, as we read in Leviticus 19:17: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart". In the next verse, the Torah adds that not only are we forbidden from hating other Jews – we are even commanded to love them ("And you shall love your fellow as yourself" – Lev. 19:18).

Our sages and biblical commentators struggled to completely understand the verse. Is there any connection between "You shall not hate your brother", the next part of the verse, "Reprove your kinsman", and the end of verse, "incur no guilt because of him"? The commentators suggested two main approaches to this issue, which we can study in order to discuss very relevant and important fundamentals tied to how we relate to people who behave and think differently than us.

The first approach (see Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Nahmanides) sees a connection between the first part of the verse and the remainder. How are we to prevent hatred between brothers – "You shall not hate"? The answer is that we must talk. "You shall reprove…". When people suspect that someone else has wronged them, they must clear up the facts and speak to that person, to avert a situation where they will resent that person in their hearts. This commandment helps us and teaches us to communicate with other people, and not to end up hating others.

In contrast, the second approach does not consider the second part of the verse a continuation of the prohibition of "… you shall not hate", but rather, as a separate commandment: "Where do we learn that one who sees someone else do something reproachable must reproach them? For it is written: "You shall reprove…" (Tractate Arakhin 16b). Moreover, "Whenever one is able to protest and does not protest, that person is connected to those that sin, for not having protested (Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 6, 8). If a person makes no effort to prevent another person from committing a crime or causing damage, the first person becomes an accomplice, and is even held (partially) responsible for the damage that was caused. The gemara also grapples with the question of when, under what circumstances, and how often a person must rebuke others for their evil actions. Naturally, in this context, we need to take another Talmudic rule into account here: "It is better that they be unwitting sinners rather than intentional sinners" (Tractate Beitza 30b), and another rabbinic treatise states as follows: "Just as it is a mitzva for a person to say that which will be heeded, so is it a mitzva for a person not to say that which will not be heeded." (Tractate Yevamot 65b).

Several very important principles form the underpinning for the commandment of rebuking others. First, "All of Israel is responsible for each other". A Jew must help another Jew improve his or her ways. Furthermore, Jews aren't allowed to remain indifferent. We may not witness questionable behavior without reacting. Of course, there are many other considerations that come into play, and it isn't always proper or possible to rebuke others, particularly, as Rabi Elazar Ben Azariah commented, "I would be surprised if there is anyone in this generation who knows how to rebuke correctly" (Tractate Eruvin, ibid.). Nonetheless, we recoil at the sight of behavior that is against the principles of the Torah, especially if that behavior is violent and destructive. On the other hand, we also need to communicate, to talk, and to listen to others.

We are living at a time when these principles aren't always clear. First of all, a Jew must feel responsible for the wellbeing of others and seek out ways of helping others live better and more meaningful lives. Moreover, there are values that we believe in, and we can't remain aloof when many of our compatriots do not observe the Torah. Yet we are required to maintain good communication with our brothers and be careful not to end up, God forbid, hating others.

Parashat Kedoshim challenges us to find the right way to cope with a diverse society, while maintaining key central values. We must know how to communicate with those that are different than us, without, God forbid, transgressing the prohibition of hating our brothers.

Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

Holiness: Debate over its Essence

By Rabbi Dr. Yizhak Roness

Parashat Kedoshim begins with the inspiring command, "You shall be holy," yet the Torah does not define clearly what this holiness consists of, nor does it specify how it is to be attained. Here we shall briefly present the positions taken by two great biblical exegetes, who gave place in their commentaries to a systematic presentation of ideas on the matter. As we shall see, each exegete presents an entire comprehensive world view of his own.

One approach emerges in Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher's introduction to his commentary on *Parashat Kedoshim*. Rabbenu Bahya (Spain, 1255-1340) begins his remarks by describing the primary spiritual challenge a person faces, since two opposing ways of life stand before him: on the one hand, he can elevate himself to the level of an angel, or alternatively, he can choose the other direction and debase himself to the level of a beast. In the opinion of Rabbenu Bahya, a person's level is determined first and foremost by his attitude towards bodily desires. If he succeeds in rising above his cravings and conquers them, "he is at the level of an angel," but if he lets his cravings rise above his intellect, "he is at the level of a beast" (Rabbenu Bahya, Leviticus 19:2).

This assertion is based on his definition of what makes human beings unique and separates them from other things created, all of which can be divided into two groups: heavenly creatures, who are "pure intellect, divorced from anything material," and earthly creations such as "trees, plants, and other living creatures, which are utterly material and have no intellect." Human beings are unique in that both the heavenly and the earthly, the body and the soul, are part of their being. The parts in a human being, however, pull in opposite directions, leaving a choice of "which side to prefer, following the mind or following nature, e.g., one's cravings." If a person struggles against the cravings, they can be shed and the person can reach the level of an angel; but if one is drawn after them, "the person becomes stripped of intellect and comes down to the level of the beast" (*loc. cit.*).

In this context, which leads to the conclusion that "one who is drawn by cravings transgresses the entire Torah," Rabbenu Bahya comes to defining holiness, and writes: "One who eschews cravings is called holy…and holiness was commanded so that people eschew their cravings" (*loc. cit.*). This is no easy challenge. Bodily cravings are imprinted in human beings from a young age. "And a person grows up along with them," so that being drawn towards bodily desires is essentially a natural human response. Therefore we were given all the commandments of the Torah: "As our Sages of blessed memory said in *Sifre*: *You shall make yourselves holy*—this is the sanctity of commandment; and then, *you shall be holy*." What is meant here is that through the commandments a person weakens one's cravings so that the force of the intellect, for the sake of which man was created, prevails (Rabbenu Bahya, Leviticus 11:44). Thus, holiness means observing the commandments, for through them a person weakens craving and strengthens the intellect.

A systematic exposition of another approach, altogether different from that of Rabbenu Bahya, is found in Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's commentary on the Torah. He begins his commentary on *Parashat Kedoshim* by noting that the admonition "You shall be holy" is "the admonition to the highest degree of moral human perfection" (S. R. Hirsch on Lev. 19:2, trans. Isaac Levy, p. 498). Indeed, in order to properly understand what this definition subsumes one must use as the fundamental point of departure the idea that the Torah does not demand of man "neglecting, curtailing, killing, or doing away with any of one's powers or natural tendencies" (*loc. cit.*, p. 498-499).

In his opinion it is inconceivable that the Torah should require "doing away with the material and sensual," since the Torah demands "the coupling of all that is material, sensual and earthly with the moral, free, godly,

eternal" (Lev. 1:5, p. 28). This purpose is fulfilled when a person uses his bodily powers to realize godly objectives. Holiness is achieved when a person devotes himself entirely to leading a moral life and stands ready "for the dictates of G-d's Will as revealed in His Torah" (Lev. 19:31, p. 561), whether by his spiritual powers or his bodily powers, for all human powers were "given to him for beneficial purposes to accomplish G-d's Will on earth" (Lev. 19:2, p. 499). When a person successfully cleaves to this objective, then "every inclination is pure and holy and" (Gen. 3:7, p. 56). Then he succeeds in "the planting of the heavenly, and the elevation of the earthly up to heavenly imperishableness" (Lev. 1:5, p. 28).

Thus human perfection is attained when body and soul work together, so that the material side in the personality is directed at and guided by the cerebral side. In such a situation "the pure human body, the moral life of the senses, are no whit less holy than the soul, the spiritual life (Gen. 2:25, p. 72).

Accordingly, Rabbi Hirsch explains that the highest point in holiness for Israel, as symbolized by the sacrificial service, is not in burning the offering on the altar, but rather in its being eaten by the priest. The human act of eating, after the sacrificing has been concluded, teaches us that the array of actions that preceded it represents "no denial of life, but are directed to a positive building up of life" (Lev. 2:3, p. 58). Likewise the rule that an offering of well-being is to be eaten by the family of the person bringing the sacrifice, as described at the beginning of this week's reading, presents the well-being offering as "spiritualizing and penetrating with morality even the enjoyments of our senses so that even the ordinary table of our joyous happy family life becomes an altar of Gd" (Lev. 19:8, p. 505). Thus we learn that "the physical sensual side of human beings is not merely not excluded from the sphere which is to be sanctified by the Mikdash, but that it is the first and most essential object of this sanctification (Ex. 38:8, p. 692).

Both approaches have certain foundations in common. Both are focused on an attempt to fathom the significance of the duality of man, being composed of body and spirit, and both concur that moral depravity stems from a situation in which a person is governed by the material element within him. In defining the ideal purpose of human beings, however, Rabbi Hirsch presents an utterly different objective from that of Rabbenu Bahya. In Rabbi Hirsch's opinion, a person is not commanded to put aside the material aspects of his being. The road to sanctification is seen not as subjugating the material to the spiritual, but as improving the material and elevating it towards the heavenly by creating peace and harmony within the person.

A vast chasm separates the two approaches one from the other. That of Rabbenu Bahya reflects the understanding that was current in his time and against which Rabbi Hirsch spoke out in his innovative remarks that smell strongly of the humanist way of thought in his generation. Did Rabbi Hirsch seek thereby to provide an answer, after the fact, to the perplexed of his generation; or, the other way around, did he see himself as attempting to "restore past glory" and instill new life in the original, ideal notion that had been lost during long years of exile? Those who respect his memory and admire his heritage debate the matter to this day. *Translated by Rachel Rowen.*

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

"He Shall Live by Them"

"And you shall observe My statutes and My judgments which if a man does them, he shall live by them." (Vayikra 18:5)

The Chassidic teachers draw a number of lessons from this verse:

1. Mitzvot are to be performed not with sadness or a sense of suffering, but rather with joy and vitality.
2.

2. At the end of the Midrash Tanchuma on the Torah we learn that an evil person is considered dead even during his lifetime, because "he sees the sun shining but does not recite the blessing '…Who creates the lights;' he sees the sun set but does not recite the blessing '…Who makes the evenings.'" The characteristic of a living being is that it reacts; it is not apathetic to what is happening around it. The same idea applies to our service of God: it should flow as a natural reaction to what is happening around us. We should feel as though we simply have to do it, that we cannot exist without it.

3. Torah and mitzvot must be a person's main activity. A person may engage for most of the day in work that enables him to earn a living, and he may learn Torah for only one hour each day, but he must feel that that one hour is the important part of his day and of his life, and that all the rest is secondary. Rashi, commenting on the verse, "And you shall observe My statutes to walk in them" (Vayikra 18:4), teaches: "One should not say, 'I have studied the wisdom of Israel; now I shall go and study the wisdom of the nations.'" One may not compare the two spheres. One may indeed study secular disciplines and other cultures, but study of Torah remains in a class of its own and is always the most important. A person should feel that Torah is his life; everything else is subservient to that purpose.

According to these interpretations, "he shall live by them" means that our observance of mitzvot must be full of life, must be a natural part of our life, and must be the focus of our life.

There is another related verse I would like to address: "The ways of the land of Egypt where you dwelled you shall not imitate, nor shall you imitate the ways of the land of Canaan where I shall bring you, AND YOU SHALL NOT WALK IN THEIR STATUTES." (Vayikra 18:3)

The Rambam explains (Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim 11:1): "We are not to follow the statutes of the idolaters, nor to imitate them either in dress nor in hairstyle… rather, a Jew should be differentiated from them and should be recognizable by his dress and by his other actions, just as he is differentiated from them by his attitudes and his thinking… He should not wear clothing that is particular to them, nor grow the fringes of his head like the fringes of theirs, etc."

Commenting on this, the Kesef Mishneh writes: "Our teacher [the Rambam] meant by this to prohibit only such dress that is particular to them, which Israelites avoid for reasons of modesty or some other reason. Since that way of dress is characteristic of them because of their immodesty and Israelites avoid it because of their religion, if they (the Israelites) were to wear it they would appear to be assenting to the idolaters and following in their ways. But if the style of dress is not particular to them in this manner, then a Jew is not obligated in this sphere to differentiate himself in any way from the idolaters."

If this is indeed what the Rambam meant, then we may ask why he did not state it explicitly. Why did he formulate his words in such a way as to imply that one should not be similar to people of other nations at all?

It would seem that although the prohibition of "walking in the ways of the nations" applies only to those customs that Jews specifically avoid, as the Kesef Mishneh explains, there nevertheless remains a principle of being different from the nations. A Jew should not spend his time trying to imitate them. He should always attempt to act differently from them, demonstrating in many different ways that he is a Jew. We should strive to show that we are not "just another nation," behaving like all the other nations and always following in their ways. We must follow our own path, guided by the service of God. It is this that the Rambam hints at in his words.

(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Acharei Mot - Kedoshim 5754 [1994].) Summarized by Matan Glidai; Translated by Kaeren Fish

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

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

The Chidushei Harim gives a very different peirush. Says the Chidushei Harim: 'Vachai Bahem' – 'you should live through them' means you will get a life through the mitzvot. Such is the beauty of the performance of the mitzvah, such is the incredible nature of the experience, that through mitzvot, we will have added quality of life, added fulfilment joy and happiness. But the definitive peirush must be that of Chazal, our sages in the Gemara in Yoma Daf 85a explains 'vachai beham v'lo yamut bahem' – 'the mitzvot should not cause any death'. The Talmud wants us to know that, God forbid, the fulfilment of a mitzvah should never cause a threat to human life. We are of course familiar with the three cardinal sins, but apart from them, there is nothing that transcends the importance of the sacred nature of life. Not Shabbat, not Yom Tov, not kashrut and right now in an extraordinary fashion we are finding that just about the entire Jewish world is fulfilling this mitzvah of 'V'chai Bahem'. Our shuls are closed, we're not gathering in numbers to perform the mitzvot that we should within a minyan because we value life, we don't want the carrying out of mitzvot to present a danger to life.

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

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

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

Rav Frand
By Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Acharei Mos
An Idolatrous Gimmick: Burn One; Get Five Trouble Free print

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

An Idolatrous Gimmick: Burn One; Get Five Trouble Free

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

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

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

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

No less a personage than the Teshuvas haRashba deals with this question (Chelek 4 Siman 18). The Teshuvas haRashba explains that it is perhaps possible to excuse a person who offers one of his sons to Molech. He is not totally wicked and for him the Torah recommends the death penalty so that it should serve as his kapparah (atonement). But a person who sacrifices all his sons to Avodah Zarah is so bad that the Torah does not allow him to have kapparah. A court executed punishment which provides atonement is too good for him. The Torah wants him to die at the Hand of Heaven and to suffer for all time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Kedoshim (Leviticus 19-20)

The Ethic of Holiness

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prophetic morality looks at the quality of relationships within a society, between us and God and between us and our fellow humans. Here are some of the key texts that define this morality. God says about Abraham, "For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right [tzedakah] and just [mishpat]."3 God tells Hosea, "I will betroth you to Me in righteousness [tzedek] and justice [mishpat], in kindness [chessed] and compassion [rachamim]."4 He tells Jeremiah, "I am the Lord, who exercises kindness [chessed], justice [mishpat] and righteousness [tzedakah] on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord."5 Those are the key prophetic words: righteousness, justice, kindness and compassion – not love.

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is one other place in which b-d-l is a key word, namely the story of creation in Genesis 1, where it occurs five times. God separates light and dark, day and night, upper and lower waters. For three days God demarcates different domains, then for the next three days He places in each its appropriate objects or life-forms. God fashions order out of the tohu va-vohu of chaos. As His last act of creation, He makes man after His "image and likeness." This was clearly an act of love. "Beloved is man," said Rabbi Akiva, "because he was created in [God's] image."6

Genesis 1 defines the priestly moral imagination. Unlike the Prophet, the Priest is not looking at society. He is not, like the wisdom figure, looking for happiness. He is looking at creation as the work of God. He knows that everything has its place: sacred and profane, permitted and forbidden. It is his task to make these distinctions and teach them to others. He knows that

different life forms have their own niche in the environment. That is why the ethic of holiness includes rules like: Don't mate with different kinds of animals, don't plant a field with different kinds of seed, and don't wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

NOTES

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

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from: Ohr Torah Stone <parsha@ots.org.il> date: Apr 30, 2020, 7:25 AM subject: OTS for YOU: Acharei Mot-Kedoshim 5780

Shabbat Shalom: Acharei Mot-Kedoshim (Leviticus 16:1-20:27)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

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

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

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

Even the famous test of Abraham, the apparent Divine command that Abraham sacrifice his son to Him, concludes with Abraham being forbidden to harm his son (Kierkegaard notwithstanding). The most classic commentary, Rashi, even goes so far as to say that Abraham misunderstood the Divine command, that God never meant that he should slaughter his son, but rather dedicate him in life and not in death.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom!

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Extraordinary Times, Extraordinary People

Apr 30, 2020 | **by Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

Battle coronavirus by loving your neighbor like yourself.

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

Those on the front lines are risking their own well-being to treat those who are ill. Those who were previously sick, rather than hibernate in recovery are donating plasma to pay it forward. Some at great personal expense and pain have pledged to continue to pay workers. A group of Chasidic men delivered 1,000 tablets to coronavirus patients in New York City hospitals to let them connect to their families who are not allowed to visit. In our community, on Seder night a young family set up a table and hosted their Seder outside the window of an elderly Holocaust survivor so he wouldn't be alone. All around us, there are ordinary people doing extraordinary things at this time.

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

What science is teaching now, the Torah has endorsed for us all along.

"Do not hate your brother in your heart….you shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge, you must love you fellow as yourself, I am Hashem" (Lev. 19:17, 18).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

R' Moshe Leib Sassover used to tell his chassidim that he learned what it means to love a fellow Jew from two Russian peasants. Once he came to an inn, where two thoroughly drunk Russian peasants were sitting at a table, draining the last drops from a bottle of strong Ukrainian vodka. One of them yelled to his friend, "Do you love me?" The friend, somewhat surprised, answered, "Of course, of course I love you!" "No, no", insisted the first one, "Do you really love me, really?!" The friend assured him, "Of course I love you. You're my best friend!" "Tell me, do you know what I need? Do you know why I am in pain?" The friend said, "how could I possibly know what you need or why you are in pain?" The first peasant answered, "How then can you say you love me when you don't know what I need or why I am in pain."

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

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

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

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

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

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from: Rabbi Yochanan Zweig <genesis@torah.org>
to: rabbizweig@torah.org
date: May 1, 2020, 12:25 AM
subject: **Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - Understand The Warning**

Parshas Kedoshim

Understand The Warning

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

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

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

1.18:6-22 2.See Makkos 17b

Stand Up For Yourself

"In the presence of an old person shall you rise…" (19:32)

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

The Talmud states that if a sage has the option of walking through an area that will require people to stand for him or take a circuitous route, he should opt for the second path. The Talmud cites a verse to uphold this ruling.3. The implication is that if there had been no verse concerning this issue, it would

be preferable to walk through the area that requires others to rise. The message that the Torah is delivering is that the obligation to stand for a sage is not a "bein adam lechaveiro" – "between man and his fellow man" responsibility. Rather, it is a "bein adam l'atzmo" – "between man and himself" responsibility. This precept is aimed at sensitizing man to the awe and respect that he must have for the Torah and those who study it. Consequently, one could have assumed that the sage is required to take the path that will require people to stand, not for his own benefit but to instill within the people the necessary sensitivities. Therefore, even if the scholar is unaware that a person is standing for him the individual is still obligated to stand.

1.19:32 2.Kidushin 33a 3.Ibid

The Friendly Teacher

"…you shall love your fellow as yourself…" (19:18)

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

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

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

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

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

From: Judah Diament <jdiament@gmail.com>

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

Subject: 7 **more piskei halacha from Rav Schachter on Coronavirus**

27. Making Up Missed Weeks of Krias HaTorah Once Shuls Reopen (2020)

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

There are two possible approaches:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Birchas Ha'gomel is meant to be recited in the presence of a minyan. It is best to recite this bracha within three days of recovering from a potentially life threatening situation, and it is improper to delay beyond thirty days. If it becomes clear that due to the danger it will be impossible to be in the presence of a minyan within thirty days, then one should recite the bracha over Zoom or phone conference with ten men watching or listening. This is possible because the requirement for a minyan is not the same as for tefilah b'tzibur or krias haTorah, which are devarim shebikedushah and require a minyan gathered in one place. In the case of Birchas Ha'gomel, the purpose of the minyan is to publicize the miracle, and this can be accomplished even if the ten individuals are listening without being present in one room.

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

In each of the three stages of mourning, Halacha mandates decreasing levels of stringency. During Shiva one refrains almost entirely from personal grooming and during Shloshim to a lesser extent. During the twelve months of mourning for a parent, one refrains from certain forms of pleasurable activities. Poskim explain that the respective guidelines of each period are

suspended when they will cause undue pain or illness. For example, prohibitions against bathing or laundering must be suspended when a risk of contagious disease will ensue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Answer:

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

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

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

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

The main problem is the oleh's position during the laining. The Shulchan Aruch (OC 139:3) rules that a blind person may not get an aliya because an oleh must read from the sefer Torah. If the oleh just listens, his berachot are l'vatala (Shulchan Aruch, OC 141:2), and reciting without reading it from the sefer does not count. Therefore, getting an aliya from a distance is a serious halachic problem. Technically, people with good vision, using a large sefer Torah, can read from close to two meters, and with masks and the oleh facing the ba'al korei's back, this seems "relatively safe." It is even safer if, after seeing the place in the sefer Torah (Shulchan Aruch, OC 139:4) and checking the furthest possible distance, he takes another step back for during the beracha. (Droplet spreading increases when speaking out loud, and during the beracha one anyway does not look in the Torah). Rav Asher Weiss (Corona Teshuvot 23) recommended (before shul closures) an enhancement – make six very short aliyot and give the ba'al korei a very long one. If health experts agree to this, this is optimal.

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

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

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

Why Is a Minyan Needed for Kaddish?

By Yehuda Shurpin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What to Do When Kaddish Is Impossible The greatest merit for the deceased is when one of their own sons recites the Kaddish. The next best option is to arrange for a close relative (e.g., son-in-law) or sibling to recite it (on condition that their own parents are no longer alive).2

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

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

In the Era of Coronavirus Due to the extraordinary situation in which we now find ourselves, Chabad.org has arranged a special (free) service in

which Kaddish is said in a safe and government-approved environment for all those who cannot do it themselves.

Sign up for the service here.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES

1. Talmud, Megillah 23b. To explain the derivation of the concept in the Talmud: Elsewhere it is written, Separate yourselves from amidst the congregation" (Numbers 16:21). Noting that the same word appears in both verses, a verbal association transmitted by tradition [i.e., a gezeirah shavah] postulates that just as the latter verse speaks about a congregation so, too, does the former verse speak about a congregation. And a congregation comprises no fewer than ten people, as it is written,— "How long will this evil congregation persist?" (Numbers 14:27). This verse refers to the spies, who numbered twelve; subtract two for Yehoshua and Calev (who were righteous), and ten remain.

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

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

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

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

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

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>
subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parshas פרשת אחרי מות - קדושים תש"פ
Parashas Acharei Mos

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

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

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

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

Horav Gedalya Schorr, zl, contends that this is exactly what the *Raavad* means. He quotes the *Rambam* in his *Pirush HaMishnah* to *Talmud Berachos* where he explains the *pasuk, Eis laasos l'Hashem heifeiru Torasecha*, "For it is a time to act for Hashem, they have voided Your Torah" (*Tehillim* 119:126). Simply, this means that at a time when so many have abandoned the Torah, it is incumbent upon those who remain loyal to it to intensify their own knowledge and observance, so that they ensure its perpetuation. *Rambam*, however, offers an innovative exposition of this *pasuk*. When the *eis*, time, comes for the nations/person to be punished -- their stretch of sin has become too long -- Hashem "enables" them/him to abandon/deny the Torah (descending their sins to a new low), warranting swift, intense punishment. *Rambam* implies a powerful principle concerning Heavenly punishment. A nation, or a person, can have committed a number of sins – none of which warrant ultimate punishment. When the time arrives, however, that they must be punished (for whatever reason, such as: in Egypt, the Jews had to leave; Canaan; the Jews were about to arrive – or, if a person's evil has become a seriously bad example and harmful influence), Hashem intevenes and "arranges" ways for them to increase their sinful behavior, so that it warrants said punishment.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* exhorts us to be concerned about the "little breaches," the ones that skirt impropriety, subtly border on moral turpitude, or act within the confines of halachah but denigrate tradition. This is how the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, ensnares a person and ultimately takes over his life. The *yetzer hora* does not openly tell a person to worship idols or to commit an act that is morally despicable. He begins with minor misdeeds and then leads up to the major violations. The Torah exhorts us, *Kedoshim tiheyu*, "Be holy!" Abstain from anything that is not holy. As long as one does not give

in on the little, subtle trespasses, he does not have to worry that the *yetzer hora* will convince him to act reprehensibly. Once one falls into the *yetzer hora's* web of deceit, however, he becomes ensnared in his net. Then, Hashem steps in with the punishment that he deserves.

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

Parashas Kedoshim

הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך ולא תשא עליו חטא

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

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

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

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

ואהבת לרעך כמוך

Love your fellow as yourself. (19:18)

Rashi quotes the well-known dictum of Rabbi Akiva, "*Zeh klal gadol baTorah*: "This is a great principle of the Torah." Why is the word "*baTorah"* added? It would be sufficient to have said simply, "This is a great principle." The *Chasam Sofer* explains that the principle of loving one's fellow *kamocha*, like yourself, is specifically *baTorah*, concerning Torah study and other spiritual pursuits. Regarding physical pursuits, one's personal needs precedes those of his fellow. There is a case in *Chazal* in which Rabbi Akiva seems to underscore the difference between spiritual pursuits and physical pursuits with regard to helping one's fellow.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

לזכר נשמת חיים יששכר בן יחיאל זאדל דוב ז"ל נפטר י"ג אייר
Feigenbaum, Richman and Finkelstein Families

Religious Ideals: Thoughts for Aharei Mot-Kedoshim

Angel for Shabbat, Aharei Mot-Kedoshim

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

This week's Torah reading instructs: do not turn to idols (Vayikra 19:4). Rabbi Yitzhak Shemuel Reggio, a 19th century Italian Torah commentator, notes that this commandment refers not only to physical idols but also to false ideas and beliefs. We need to hold correct notions, and not subscribe to foolish ideas and superstitions. True religion demands a commitment to truth. It requires us to study, to think, to use our rational faculties to the utmost. To follow after superstition is a form of idolatry.

The Torah reading also instructs: you shall love your neighbor as yourself (19:18). Rabbi Reggio comments that it is not possible to love another person as much as we love ourselves; what, then, does this Torah passage mean? He translates the verse as follows: you shall love your neighbor who is like you i.e. you must remember that all human beings are created in the image of God, all have the right to respect and dignity, all share a common humanity. If you recognize that the "other" is actually "like yourself", you will be able to love/empathize/respect him or her.

These two comments by Rabbi Reggio are at the root of a proper understanding of Torah Judaism. On the one hand, Judaism demands an unflinching desire to discover and uphold truth. It eschews the superstitious view that sees religion as a set of magic formulae intended to control God; or as a means of warding off evil supernatural spirits. God must be served through Truth, which is God's own trademark. Following superstitious beliefs or practices--even if they seem to be "religious"--is actually a form of idolatry. Rambam, in his famous code of Jewish Law, Mishneh Torah (Laws of Mezuzah, 5:4), offers an example of misguided religiosity. He condemns the practice of some individuals who write names of angels or saintly men inside their mezuzot, and who think that the mezuzot on their doorposts are magic objects designed to keep away evil spirits. Rambam states that such people have no share in the world to come! "Those fools not only fail to fulfill the commandment, but they treat an important precept...as if it were an amulet to benefit themselves, since they foolishly suppose that the mezuzah is something advantageous for the vain pleasures of this world." In fact, the mezuzah teaches the unity of God, and our obligation to love and revere Him.

Torah Judaism demands not only a keen commitment to truth, but also a keen sense of responsibility to human beings. Rabbi Reggio's universalistic understanding of the "golden rule" teaches that all human beings--whatever their race, religion or nationality--are entitled to be treated "like ourselves". They, too, were created by God. They, too, have the human qualities with which we are endowed. If we can see "them" as being just like "us", we are more likely to develop a sense of kinship and responsibility to all of humanity.

The Torah commands clear thinking and righteous behavior. It prods us to live according to the ideals expressed in the opening passage of Kedoshim: you shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy.

By:
Rabbi Marc Angel
Angel for Shabbat

Parshat Acherei Mot and Kedoshim: Holiness Revisited

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

HOLINESS REVISITED:

A few weeks ago, in discussing Parashat Shemini, we paid special attention to the term "kedusha," usually translated "holiness." We often leave "holiness" pretty much unexplained, mostly, perhaps, because it is difficult to define holiness in terms of anything else. We rely on an 'intuitive' or general sense of what kedusha means rather than trying to define it concretely. This view of kedusha understands the concept of holiness as a spiritual quality which inheres in various entities (times, places, objects); kedusha can be achieved by people, too, when they perform the mitzvot. In this sense, kedusha is not a means, it is an end.

KEDUSHA AS A STRATEGY:

But we took a different tack in our discussion several weeks ago, attempting to understand what "kedusha" might mean on a more concrete level. The perspective we developed saw kedusha not as an inhering spiritual quality, not as an end in itself, but as a strategy, a way of providing opportunities for important values to be concretized. Kedusha is not the ultimate goal, for all it means is "dedication"; when something becomes "kadosh," that means that it is specially dedicated to a religiously important purpose. When the Torah commands us to make *ourselves* holy, for example, the Torah is not instructing us to seek some elusive, difficult-to-define spiritual quality, it is instructing us to be *dedicated*! "Kedoshim tihyu," the words for which Parashat Kedoshim is named, does not mean "Be holy" so much as it means "Be dedicated." Dedicated to what? The Torah immediately provides concrete details: the full range of mitzvot is what we are called to perform with complete dedication -- the ritual, the moral, the interpersonal, the cultic (sacrificial).

We also noted that almost every context where kedusha is mentioned in the Torah in connection with a mitzvah, is a context which involves restrictions and prohibitions. What is it about kedusha that brings in prohibitions? If we understand kedusha as that metaphysical 'something,' it may be hard to say; but if we understand kedusha as 'dedication,' I think it becomes clear: something which is 'dedicated' cannot be openly accessible to everyone and everything, equally usable for everyone's purposes, because 'dedication' means that the thing in question is devoted to specific goals.

For example, the Torah describes a set of days in the calendar as "mikra'ei kodesh," "Times in which holiness is proclaimed." These are more familiar to us as Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Rosh Ha-Shana, Pesah, Shavuot, and Succot. These days are dedicated to particular themes; we are meant to spend these times thinking about important ideas. If we were to spend these days at work, we would never have that opportunity. This is why the Torah consistently connects the holiness of these days ("mikra'ei kodesh") to the prohibition of doing creative work on these days (and eating, drinking, etc. on Yom Kippur). The Torah's declaration that these days are holy, dedicated, implies that they are reserved for special activities, and that our normal (work) activities cannot continue. Kedusha, then, creates a space of time which we are commanded to fill with a particular content. On Shabbat, we are to contemplate the Creation and the Exodus; on Yom Kippur, we are to contemplate our sins and work toward teshuva; and so on:

DEDICATION --> RESTRICTION --> OPPORTUNITY.

THE "ARAYOT":

Parashat Ahrei Mot and Parashat Kedoshim present a series of mitzvot which restrict the sexual relationships available to us. These prohibitive mitzvot are known loosely as the "arayot," an untranslatable term which means roughly, "cardinal sexual crimes" (I say 'loosely' because not all of the crimes included here are necessarily classified as 'arayot' in the strict halakhic sense). The Torah and Hazal connect these mitzvot in particular with the idea of kedusha. According to the understanding developed above, kedusha creates protected space for important values. What values are being protected here?

There are at least three ways to look for evidence on this question:

1) Looking at the list of cardinal sexual crimes to see if they fit into a theme or themes.
2) Looking for the rationale or rationales provided by the mefarshim.
3) Looking for the rationale or rationales provided by the text of the Torah itself.

1) With which individuals are sexual relationships restricted here?

a) Incest: mother, stepmother, sister, granddaughter, stepsister, aunt, daughter-in-law, brother's wife, wife's daughter or granddaughter, wife's sister.
b) A menstruating woman.
c) Adultery with a married woman.
d) Sex between men.
e) Bestiality.

This list really becomes meaningful when we compare it to the list of crimes included in, say, the Rambam's discussion of various sexual mitzvot in Moreh ha-Nevukhim (Guide of the Perplexed), 3:49:

a) All of the above crimes.
b) Rape.
c) Seduction.
d) Prostitution by men or women.
e) Sota: a woman suspected by her husband of infidelity.
f) Yibbum

Clearly, the Rambam's list is much more inclusive than the list in the arayot section in the Torah. The Rambam is being thorough, relating to all of the sexual crimes and positive mitzvot. Since it seems clear that the parashat ha-arayot is not all-inclusive of sexual crimes, what is it really about? What are its themes, which justify leaving out the rest of the sexual crimes?

2) Looking for the rationale or rationales provided by the mefarshim.

What do the various mefarshim (commentators) suggest the Torah is trying to teach us? We might have expected that mefarshim would either remain silent on the issue or consider these crimes inherently immoral or inherently disgusting. Indeed, this is part of the thrust of the Ramban's opinion:

RAMBAN, VAYIKRA 18:6

". . . The arayot are among the 'hukkim,' matters which are "decrees of the King." "Decrees" are matters which occur to the King's mind as the best way to guide His kingdom; He knows the need and the benefit in each commandment He commands, and He tells it only to the wise men among His advisors."

On the other hand, as we will see, the Ramban does speculate to some degree about the rationale for the arayot. Other mefarshim go much further. The Sefer Ha-Hinukh cites both the Rambam and the Ramban:

SEFER HA-HINUKH -- MITZVAH 190

"As to the reason that relatives are prohibited, the Rambam wrote that the point is that the Torah wants to distance us from the sexual act, other than what is necessary for procreation or as a mitzvah; it therefore prohibited the relatives, since one is likely to stumble through them because they are always available.

"The Ramban, however, said that this reason is very weak--would the Torah impose excision ["karet"] for these [relatives] because they are always available, and yet would allow a man to marry a hundred women, or a thousand! Instead, he [the Ramban] said, 'According to logic, this is one of the secrets of Creation, something attached to the soul, and is included with the "sod ha-ibbur" [understood by commentators to mean that incest produces children whose souls are somehow defective].'

"I have also seen that the Rambam offers another reason, on the peshat level, in my opinion: he says that the Torah wants to prevent us from behaving presumptuously by having intimacy with a woman whom we are commanded to honor. He [the Rambam] makes strenuous efforts to explain most of the arayot on this basis, but repeating all of that would take too long.

In discussing the various arayot as they come up in the arayot section, the Sefer Ha-Hinukh adds whatever rationales he believes are specific to those prohibitions. Some examples:

SEFER HA-HINUKH -- MITZVAH 191

"'Not to reveal the nakedness of one's father's wife' . . . the roots of this mitzvah are what we have already written about the close relatives [in general]. We can also say that the reason is that this is disrespect toward one's father."

SEFER HA-HINUKH -- MITZVAH 206

"'Not to sleep with two sisters' . . . the roots of the area of arayot, we have already written above. But my heart also tells me that the Torah forbids marrying two sisters because the Master of Peace desires peace among all of His creations, and certainly among those creations that nature and logic decree there should be peace, not strife and competition all day."

SEFER HA-HINUKH -- MITZVAH 209

"'Not to sleep with other men' . . . the roots of this mitzvah are that Hashem desires that the world be filled and settled, and therefore commanded that we not destroy our seed through sleeping with other men, for that is truly destruction of seed through something which has no procreative purpose at all and is not a mitzvah, besides the fact that this filth is disgusting in the eyes of anyone who has common sense . . . and based on this [the prohibition of sex for non-procreative/mitzvah purposes], the Sages said that it is forbidden to marry a woman to a minor, for it is like zenut [sex for the sake of pleasure alone]; and also that a man should not marry either a very old woman or a barren woman who cannot bear children."

Despite the Ramban's suggestion that the arayot are either "hukkim" or are based on a mystical idea, he does not hesitate to offer a rationale for the prohibition of the nida, the menstruating woman:

RAMBAN, VAYIKRA 18:19

"'A woman in the nida state of impurity': the Torah forbids the nida because of the reason I have already mentioned, that the Torah permits sexual intimacy only for the purpose of procreation . . . ."

Shadal (Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Lutzatto), in his Torah commentary, offers what is to some degree a synthesis of some of the approaches above:

SHADAL, VAYIKRA CH. 18

"The purpose of the sexual prohibitions is not, as the Rambam thought (Moreh Ha-Nevukhim 3:49), to cut down on the amount of intercourse, for the Torah did not forbid having many wives (except for a king), and neither did it forbid very frequent intercourse with one woman. Instead, the reason for the prohibitions is for the good of society. With regard to married women, the reason [for the prohibition] is obvious: to prevent violence, strife, and murder, all of which would result from adultery. And even if there were a man who was willing to allow this and free his wife to be intimate with a rich man, it is forbidden because of the damage it would cause to the character of the nation as a whole. The prohibitions of intimacy with men [for other men] and animals is because they are unnatural acts; if they were permitted, people would not marry women to the same degree.

"The arayot which are "she'er basar" [close relatives] are forbidden in order to encourage the success of the household, the development of proper midot [character traits], and the success of the entire nation. For taking one's mother, stepmother, father's sister, or father's brother's wife are acts which are against the requirement to honor one's father and mother, and neglecting honor of one's father and mother destroys one's midot and destroys the structure of the household . . . . The reason for the prohibition of marrying one's sister seems to be for the good of the nation: if one's sister were permitted, most men would marry their sisters, and each family would become like a nation unto itself, and the families would not intermarry and mix with each other. The nation would not be like one nation, but instead like many nations, distant from each other and not loving each other.

SUMMARY:

We have seen the following rationales among the mefarshim for the arayot as a group or for particular arayot; these are the values or structures being protected by the kedusha (--> restriction) of the arayot prohibitions:

1) To decrease the amount of sexual activity available to people.
2) The rationale is hidden, as the arayot are "hukkim."
3) To preserve the sense of respect one must maintain toward various relatives.
4) To prevent the sexual act from becoming a vehicle for anything but procreation or a mitzvah.
5) To maintain peace within the family.
6) To insure that new souls which are brought into the world are not defective in some way.

One theme which can be drawn from several of these rationales is the protection of the family as a unit for reproduction and for healthy growth and support. In this sense, the arayot may be split into two categories:

1) Those arayot whose purpose is to protect the family as a unit for healthy growth and support.
2) Those arayot whose purpose is to protect the family as a unit for reproduction.

Under the first category, we would include the following, for example:
a) All of one's close relatives, such as one's parent, one's child, or one's sibling.
b) People who are closely related to each other, such as a woman and her daughter, or two sisters.
c) Married women.

Under the second category, we would include:
a) A nida.
b) Bestiality.
c) The male homosexual act.

All of the crimes in the first category threaten either our own familial relationship with these people (sleeping with one's mother, for example, threatens the requisite respect due her and also destroys the familial structural boundaries between son and mother), or threaten the relationship between two other people (marrying two sisters, for example, threatens the relationship between the sisters; sleeping with a married woman threatens the relationship between her and her husband). On the other hand, all of the crimes in the second category are cases in which the sexual act becomes an outlet for desires other than procreation.

[In a sense, when humans engage in the sexual act in an effort to be (pro)creative and thereby emulate Hashem's creativity, they are achieving one of the fundamental goals of human life as a tzelem Elokim. This is made explicit by Hashem's charge to humanity just

after He created it, and again after He re-established it after the Flood: our power to make ourselves "images of God" is explicitly linked to "peru u-revu," our power to emulate Hashem by creating. On the other hand, when humans engage in the sexual act with intentions other than procreation or the creation of a relationship with procreative ends, the act becomes animal-like, and deserves the comparison implicit in the Torah's grouping sex with a nida along with bestiality. I do not mean, of course, to compare a nida to an animal, God forbid.]

THE TEXT:

Although I do not have time to offer details, there are some indications in the text of the parashat ha-arayot (in Perek 18) which support the idea that the family is what is being protected. The Torah distinguishes implicitly between "she'er" prohibitions and "ervat X" prohibitions. The former category includes the closest relatives: one's children, siblings, and parents. Whenever the term is used here, it is always in the sense, "Do not share intimacy with X; she is the 'she'er' of your Y," where X is the forbidden relative, and Y is a person whom you are required to respect. For example, the Torah tells us that one's father's sister is forbidden because "she is the 'she'er' of your father." If one could approach one's father's sister in this manner, one's respect for one's father would be diminished.

The latter category, "ervat X," includes relatives who are not one's own close relatives, but who are instead people with sexual commitments to X, where X is a close relative of one's own. For example, the Torah prohibits intimacy between a man and his stepmother, not because the man is closely related to his stepmother, but because "ervat avikha hi"--literally, "it is the nakedness of your father" that you are uncovering, in a sense, not only the nakedness of the stepmother. Intimacy with the stepmother jeopardizes not only the relationship between her and one's father (as does any case of adultery), it also threatens the relationship between one and one's father.

In terms of the category of crimes which are meant to prevent intimacy which is not aimed toward procreation, it is interesting to note that the Torah includes among the arayot a crime which seems completely out of place: the prohibition of Molekh. Molekh was a form of idol worship which seems to have involved sacrificing children (although the issue is debated). In any event, in the context of specifically the arayot of nida, male homosexual sex, and bestiality, the Torah places the prohibition of sacrificing children, hinting, perhaps, that all of these crimes share one thing: they are all inimical to procreation, or, more pointedly, they are all paths which take the potential for propagation of children and direct it toward other purposes.

May our families be places of support for growth and development, and may our efforts toward creativity of all types be successful.

Shabbat Shalom

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for PARSHAT ACHAREI MOT

In the middle of Parshat Acharei Mot, an abrupt change takes place in Sefer Vayikra.

Even though its first 17 chapters dealt exclusively with laws that relate to the Mishkan, in chapter 18 we find a complete section about forbidden marital relationships [better known as the "arayot"] that appear to be totally unrelated to the Mishkan.

Then, in Parshat Kedoshim, we find yet another set of laws (mostly ethical) that have almost no connection at all to the Mishkan.

So what keeps Sefer Vayikra together?

Should we conclude that it is primarily laws relating to the Mishkan plus a few 'add-ons'? Or, is there some thematic significance in this transition that could lead us to a deeper understanding of what the book is all about.

In this week's shiur, we attempt to answer this question by taking a closer look at the nature of this transition.

INTRODUCTION

We begin our shiur with a quick overview of Sefer Vayikra to help clarify our opening statement.

The following table summarizes Sefer Vayikra according to its primary topics. As you review this table, note how chapter 18 marks the beginning of this transition (from Mishkan related to non-Mishkan related topics):

PART I - THE MISHKAN AS THE PRIMARY TOPIC

CHAPTER	TOPIC
1-5	MISHKAN/ korbanot of the individual [ndava and chova]
6-7	MISHKAN/ how the kohanim will offer the korbanot
8-10	MISHKAN/ its dedication ceremony [narrative]
11-15	MISHKAN/ "tumah & tahara" [who can enter...]
16	MISHKAN/ "avoda" of the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur
17	MISHKAN/ no korbanot permitted outside the Mishkan

PART II - MISC. TOPICS

CHAPTER	TOPIC
18	GENERAL/ prohibited marriage relationships etc.
19-20	GENERAL/ "kdoshim t'hiyu" [a variety of laws]
21-22	KOHANIM/ special laws regarding the kohanim
23	HOLIDAYS/ focus on the agricultural aspect
24	MISC./ re: Menorah, Shulchan & capital punishment
25	SHMITA/ the seven year shmita & Yovel cycle
26	TOCHACHA/ reward & punishment for keeping the laws
27	VOWS/ "erchin", valuation of pledges

As the above table shows, the first seventeen chapters of Sefer Vayikra form a distinct unit, for that entire section discusses various laws concerning the Mishkan. In contrast to that unit, the remaining ten chapters (18->27) discuss a wide ranges of topics, some Mishkan related; others not. At first glance, it is difficult to find a common theme to this second section. Nonetheless, it is clearly distinct from the first section of the sefer.

To uncover the thematic significance of this division, let's take a closer look at the beginning of chapter 18, i.e. at the very location where this transition begins.

A NEW HEADER

For a start, let's read the opening five psukim of chapter 18, noting how they form a separate 'parshia':

> "And God told Moshe, speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them: **ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM** - [I am the Lord Your God!] DO NOT act as the Egyptians did, and do not act as the Canaanites... do not follow their laws. [Instead] KEEP MY LAWS... for **ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM**. Keep My laws and My commandments which man must do and live by keeping them for **ANI HASHEM**." (see 18:1-5)

Review these psukim once again, noting how they discuss a very general topic, i.e. how Bnei Yisrael should conduct their lives. They must first reject Egyptian and Canaanite culture and follow God's laws instead. Clearly, these psukim form an introduction to the entire set of mitzvot that will follow.

> [Not only do they 'set the stage' for the laws concerning prohibited marital relationships ["arayot"] that follow in 18:6-23, they also introduce ALL of the mitzvot that follow until the TOCHACHA at the end of the Sefer. To verify this point, compare phrase "chukim & mishpatim" in 26:46 with 18:3-5; compare also them of chapter 26 with 18:24-29!]

We will now show how 18:1-5 serves not only as an introduction to chapter 18, but also forms the introduction to the entire 'second half' of the Sefer Vayikra.

We begin our discussion by paying special attention to a key phrase that is repeated several times in this introduction, and that will appear numerous times again in the second half of the Sefer.

ANI HASHEM

Review 18:1-5 once again, noting the Torah's repeated use of the phrase ANI HASHEM [or alternately ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM]. Not only is this phrase mentioned THREE times in these opening psukim, it is also repeated over FIFTY times from this point in Sefer Vayikra until the end of the sefer. Furthermore, this phrase is included in most every pasuk that introduces or summarizes a key topic!

> [See, for example, 18:30; 19:2,3,4,10,12,14,16,18,30 -32,36-37; 20:24-26; 22:2,3,16,31-33; 23:22,43; 24:22; 25:17,38,55; 26:1-2,13,44-45 & their context (that will keep you busy).]

In contrast, this phrase is found only once in the first half of the Sefer. [See 11:44-45/ note that even here it is used in relation to the laws of kosher animals, which themselves are only tangentially related to the Mishkan.]

This emphasis upon the phrase of ANI HASHEM may provide us with a clue toward understanding the overall theme of the second half of the sefer.

LIMITATION OR EMANATION

At first glance, it seems rather absurd that when Sefer Vayikra describes the laws concerning the "korbanot" [sacrifices] that were offered in the Mishkan - the site where God's SHCHINA is present - the phrase ANI HASHEM [lit. I am God] is barely mentioned; yet when it discusses various laws which must be kept OUTSIDE the Mishkan, the phrase is emphasized over and over again! Considering that the phrase "ANI HASHEM" serves as a reminder that we stand before God, we would certainly expect to find it mentioned more often in relation to the Mishkan!

One could suggest that the Torah wishes to emphasize precisely the opposite! The Torah may fear that this intense level of "kedusha" caused by God's Presence in the Mishkan may lead to the misconception that God's Presence is LIMITED to the Mishkan! Therefore, as it describes the laws of daily life that Am Yisrael must keep when they are outside the Mishkan, the repetition of the phrase "ani Hashem" becomes quite meaningful.

> [We are all too familiar with the consequences of this 'mistaken conclusion', i.e. where one's spiritual behavior is meticulous while visiting God's residence (be it the Mishkan, or a synagogue), in contrast to the more secular nature of his behavior once he leaves its environs.]

The very structure of Sefer Vayikra (i.e. its two halves, as noted above) may come to counter this misconception - for it emphasizes that the Mishkan does not LIMIT the "shechina" to its confines, rather, it serves as conduit to allow God's presence to EMANATE. Ideally, man's experience in the Mishkan should leave a profound effect on his way of life outside the Mishkan. As we will soon explain, this concept relates to the very essence of KEDUSHA.

From a thematic perspective, one could apply this explanation to the two halves of Sefer Vayikra. Even though the primary topic of Sefer Vayikra may be the laws relating to the Mishkan, the second half of the sefer intentionally includes numerous mitzvot that serve as an example of how we TRANSLATE the intense level of SHCHINA found in the Mishkan into the daily walks of life.

In the Mishkan itself, the concept of "ani Hashem" is so clear, that there is no need for a constant reminder. However, outside its confines, man must be constantly reminded that God's Presence remains everywhere.

[This concept of the Mishkan serving as a funnel to bring the 'shechina' from heaven to a fountain-like source on earth from which it can emanate to all mankind is reflected in the prophecies of Zecharya (see 14:8-9) and Yeshayahu (see 2:1-5).]

A THEMATIC PROGRESSION

To better appreciate the meaning of these two sections, it is helpful to first review our earlier observations regarding Sefer Vayikra (as we discussed in our introductory shiur).

In contrast to the other books of Chumash that are 'narrative based' (i.e. they begin and end with a story), Sefer Vayikra is 'commandment based' (i.e. it contains a collection of various mitzvot which God commanded Moshe and Aharon to teach Bnei Yisrael). Therefore, the progression of parshiot in the sefer is thematic as opposed chronological.

We also explained that the sefer, referred to by Chazal as TORAT KOHANIM, begins as an 'instruction manual' for the Mishkan. Even though we expected that Sefer Vayikra would deal exclusively with Mishkan related commandments, as was the case in the first seventeen chapters, the second half introduces a wide range of mitzvot which must be kept outside the Mikdash for they reflect how God's Presence in the Mishkan should affect our behavior in all aspects of life.

This can explain the internal progression of parshiot as well. For example, in chapter 18 we are told how one should not act, while in chapter 19 we are instructed how one SHOULD ACT, i.e. Parshat K'DOSHIM T'HIYU - acting in a sanctified manner in all walks of life.

KEDUSHA

This concept, i.e. SETTING ASIDE one special site (e.g. the Mishkan) where God's Presence is more intense - IN ORDER to bring sanctity to all surrounding areas, can be understand as the most basic concept of KEDUSHA.

For example, we can explain the "kedusha" of SHABBAT in a very similar manner, i.e. we set aside one day of the week, sanctifying it with an increased level of God's "shechina"- in order to elevate the spiritual level of each day of the week - for our experience on shabbat will affect our behavior on each weekday (as we anticipate shabbat). [See Ramban on Shmot 12:1 in his explanation of KIDUSH ha'CHODESH!]

One can explain the KEDUSHA on AM YISRAEL in a similar manner, i.e. God SET ASIDE a special nation (see Sefer Breishit), sanctifying it with special mitzvot (see Sefer Shmot) - IN ORDER to deliver God's message of sanctity to all mankind (see Devarim 4:5-8).

Note as well how these three examples, Mishkan, Shabbat, and Am Yisrael - reflect the three basic categories of KEDUSHA in the realms of space, time, and matter:

kedushat MAKOM (place) - the Mishkan
kedushat ZMAN (time) - Shabbat, &
kedushat ADAM (man) - Am Yisrael.

A THEME FOR SEFER VAYIKRA

With this background, we can suggest a common theme for all the mitzvot in the second half of the sefer, as well as their relationship to the first half of the sefer. Note how these final ten chapters of Vayikra can be divided according to these three basic realms of "kedusha" (sanctity or holiness):

1) KEDUSHAT ADAM - man / chapters 18->22
e.g. kedushat Am Yisrael and/or kohanim

2) KEDUSHAT ZMAN - time / chapter 23
e.g. shabbat and "moadim" (holidays)

3) KEDUSHAT MAKOM - place or land / chapters 24-26
e.g. the laws of SHMITA in the land of Israel

However, "kedusha" can also be considered the primary theme of the first half of Sefer Vayikra as well, for the Mishkan itself is also referred to as a MIKDASH. The word "mikdash" evolves from the same shoresh - k.d.sh. [as in "kedusha"], implying the setting aside of something for a special purpose (see Breishit 2:3, 38:21 and Shmot 13:1!) for a divine purpose. The Mikdash is a special sanctuary set aside for the worship of God.

Likewise, in "kedushat adam", Am Yisrael is set aside to serve God; so too the kohanim etc. In "kedushat zman", "shabbat" and the "moadim" are set aside from the other days of the week for a divine purpose. In "kedushat makom", the land of Israel is set aside from all others as God's special land.

Based on this analysis, we can suggest an overall theme for Sefer Vayikra. Recall that at Har Sinai, before receiving the Torah, Bnei Yisrael entered a covenant to accept God's laws in order to become a "mamlechet kohanim v'GOY KADOSH" (see Shmot 19:4-6). Sefer Vayikra explains HOW Bnei Yisrael become this "goy kadosh" [holy nation], not only by worshiping God in the MISHKAN, but also by keeping the daily mitzvot of kedushat ADAM, ZMAN, & MAKOM - the constant reminders of God's Presence - as emphasized by the phrase: ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM - in their daily lives.

TORAT KOHANIM

This observation can help us appreciate the name that Chazal use to describe Sefer Vayikra - TORAT KOHANIM [Laws for Priests]. Based on our original analysis this name would appear to be a bit inaccurate, for Sefer Vayikra includes many laws that have nothing to do with Kohanim and/or the Mishkan. However, based on this deeper theme in second half of Sefer Vayikra, the word 'KOHANIM' in the name TORAT KOHANIM may refer not only to the KOHANIM who work in the Mishkan, but also to the entire nation of Israel who serve as a MAMALECHET KOHANIM v'GOY KADOSH - a nation of priests in service of God - working towards bringing God's Name to all mankind.

This recognition of ANI HASHEM, experienced at an intense level when one visits the Mishkan, must be internalized to affect one's conduct, even outside the Mishkan, and in all walks of life.

In our shiur on Parshat Kedoshim, we will explain how this distinction can enhance our understanding of chapter 19 and its connection to the Ten Commandments. Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN
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TUMAH OF THE LAND

A. Read 18:24-30, the concluding psukim of chapter 18. Do these psukim simply summarize the chapter or serve as a continuation of the introductory nature of 18:1-5?

Where else do we find a concept of being banished from a land in punishment for sinful behavior? (See Vayikra 18:28/ See also Ramban!! - be careful, it's very "tzioni")

Relate this to the situation in Gan Eden and Vayikra 26:3-13.

Based on your answer, why do you think that the Midrash equates Eretz Yisrael with Gan Eden? Relate also to Vayikra 18:5, Devarim 30:15-20 and Mishlei 3:18.]

In the above mentioned psukim we also find a concept of "tumah" (18:24-28). In what manner is this concept of TUMAH different that the laws of TUMAH found thus far in Sefer Vayikra?

In what manner is it similar?

B. AVODAT KOHEN GADOL ON YOM KIPPUR

It is interesting to note that on Yom Kippur shacharit we read Vayikra chapter 16, while at mincha we read Vayikra chapter 18. Now the reason why we read chapter 16 is simple, for it details the special AVODAH of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur in the Bet ha'Mikdash. However, why do read specifically chapter 18 for mincha? After the prohibition of "arayot" (the primary topic) contains no obvious connection to Yom Kippur?

Some explain that this custom is simply for convenience; i.e. as we may be too tired to roll the 'sefer' to another location, we simply read a chapter nearby to what we read in the morning. However, based on the above shiur, we can offer a more significant explanation.

As we explained above, chapter 16 constitutes the climax of the first half of Sefer Vayikra for on Yom Kippur, as the "kohen gadol" enters the "kodesh ha'kdoshim" on the "shabbat shabbaton", Am Yisrael ascends to the highest level in all three realms of "kedusha":

1) "kedushat adam" - kohen gadol
2) "kedushat makom" - kodesh k'doshim
3) "kedushat zman" - shabbat shabbaton

However, it is just as important to remind ourselves that these concentrated levels of "kedusha" must be incorporated into daily life. As Yom Kippur draws to its close, or possibly its true climax, we must remind ourselves of this hashkafic message of the second half of Sefer Vayikra. This may be the reason why Chazal saw it appropriate that we read this pivotal chapter (18:1-30) at Mincha time, for Yom Kippur marks not only the culmination of the year which has passed, but also sets us in the proper direction for the new year which is about to begin.