

On Thursday night we counted the 22nd day of the Omer. Count the next number for Shabbat on Friday night

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

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

Mazel-Tov to Hillel Schwartz on his Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat at Beth Sholom Congregation in Potomac, MD. Mazel-Tov also to Hillel's parents, Mark & Naomi Schwartz, brother Ezra, grandfather Erick Langer, and Aunt Anne Carlson.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Acharei Mot and Kedoshim reach us during non-leap years as a combined parsha but as separate parashot during leap years. Why would chazal have selected these parashot in particular to be combined? What follows are primarily my thoughts, along with some insights from the Devrei Torah of various Torah scholars below.

A substantial section of Acharei Mot concerns the annual visit of the Kohen Gadol into the Mishkan or Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Kohen Gadol would take special incense into his fire pot. The incense would burn and cause smoke that would rise and join with the cloud of Hashem rising from the top of the Aron Kodesh. This mixing of the smoke was the only way that a human (other than Moshe at times) could directly enter God's presence after Adam and Chava had to leave Gan Eden. This mingling of the Kohen Gadol's smoke with Hashem's presence was an annual highlight for both the Kohen Gadol and all the Jews who were present outside the Mishkan. As Rabbi David Fohrman explains, a side effect of the Kohen Gadol's Yom Kippur ritual was that the mixing of Hashem's cloud with the Kohen Gadol's cloud wiped away the sins (tumah) of the people.

The other time when the generation of the Exodus came close to a human meeting Hashem was at Har Sinai at the time of the Revelation (Yitro). The Torah continues the Har Sinai experience with Mishpatim. Yitro contains the Aseret Dibrot (Ten Statements); Mishpatim provides dozens of specific laws that translate the Statements into specific actions (mitzvot or laws). Kedoshim builds on Acharei Mot's ways to cleanse humans from tumah (spiritual uncleanness) to become tahor (spiritually pure). Kedoshim extends the cleansing of tumah in Acharei Mot to the fundamental theme of kosher living: "*You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your God.*" (19:2)

It is possible for a person to observe all the rituals and all 613 mitzvot but not to be Kadosh, holy. Kedoshim, especially 19:2, adds that we must live as part of a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, and emulate Hashem's holiness. As Rabbi Marc Angel states, Kadosh is both a privilege and a responsibility – it is the totality of religious life. As Rabbi Hayyim Angel observes, Kadosh means that our entire life should reflect Hashem's values.

In a non-leap year, Acharei Mot and Kedoshim come shortly after the end of Pesach, within days of Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israeli Memorial Day and Independence Day). Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz observes that Israel has lost 30,961 Jewish soldiers, police officers, and civilians to wars and related enemy attacks over the past 78 years. However, we Jews lost six million of our people during the Nazi period, when no other country would accept Jewish refugees from Europe. The cost of not having a Jewish homeland is far, far greater than the cost involved fighting to keep a Jewish Israel.

Perhaps the overall theme of Sefer Vayikra is what is required to live in or near the presence of Hashem. Much of the Sefer discusses the requirements to be tahor. Kedoshim adds the requirement of being Kadosh – dedicating our lives to emulating God. As Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer observes, humans are not perfect, and humans therefore sin (become tamei at times). God could have chosen to populate His realm with perfect beings – angels. Hashem, however, decided to open His world to humans, and therefore He had to be willing to accept some sins and tumah. He also provided a means for those who become tamei to become tahor again. Much of Acharei Mot and Kedoshim involves this process of becoming fit to live in Hashem's presence.

Chazal originally selected readings from Ezekiel chapters 20 and 22 for the haftorot of Acharei Mot and Kedoshim. These chapters contain strong rebukes to B'Nai Yisrael for their sins (which culminated in the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile). In the early 20th Century, the custom developed among most Ashkenazic communities to replace the chapters from Ezekiel with a more positive message, from Amos (9:7-15) – a message that Hashem will forgive the Jews and return us to Zion, where the Jews will be successful again.

Rabbi Brander finds an additional reason to be optimistic with a movement toward closer cooperation among segments of the Israeli community since the horrors of October 7. More parts of the religious community are participating in service to the country, and many soldiers are including mitzvot in their daily behavior. Hannah and I are preparing to take our sons and their families with us for a two week tour of Israel later this year. (We originally planned this trip for Purim 5784 but had to postpone because of the war.) We hope to do our part in helping our grandchildren understand the problems our people have faced over the past few thousand years and why Israel is so important to all Jews.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Haftarat Parshat Acharei Mot – Kedoshim: In Defense of Jerusalem

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftorah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders

of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

The haftarah we read this Shabbat carries a quiet but significant story, one that resonates with particular urgency in our embattled world. But to understand it, we must first trace a fascinating thread through centuries of halakhic history.

The Rambam, in his listing of the haftarah readings at the end of his Sefer Ahava in the Mishneh Torah, prescribes that Parshat Acharei Mot be accompanied by a passage from Ezekiel 22, and Parshat Kedoshim by a reading from Ezekiel 20. Both passages are unflinching rebukes against the abominations committed by Israel, opening with the language of judgment: *"hatishpot."* In addition, there is a well-established principle governing combined parashiyot: When two are read together on a single Shabbat, the haftarah follows the second parsha – this case, that of Kedoshim: Ezekiel 20.

And yet, the common Ashkenazi practice for this week ignores all the above. For Parshat Acharei Mot, we read a passage from chapter 9 of Amos, beginning *"Halo khivnei khushiim,"* a selection not even mentioned by the Rambam for either of these parshiyot. And when Acharei Mot and Kedoshim are read together, we still do not follow the general rule of the haftarah following the second parsha – Ezekiel 20. The passage from Amos remains the haftarah that is read.

The passage in question is a beautiful prophecy that combines criticism of Israel's failings with an inspiring vision of redemption: *"I will bring back the exiled of My nation, Israel. They will build ruined cities and settle. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine"* (v. 14). This departure from two rules in a single week demands an explanation.

The Mordechai (Megilla 831) offers a direct answer: the language of the haftarah from Ezekiel designated for Kedoshim – a catalogue of Israel's failures and failings – is simply too harsh for us to publicly direct at the people of Israel and Jerusalem. Given the choice, we prefer not to read such a passage aloud. This instinct finds support in the Mishna (Megilla 4:10), where Rabbi Eliezer forbids reading a similarly severe prophecy from Ezekiel 16 as a haftarah. The Gemara (Megilla 25b) sharpens this point with a telling story: a man who insisted on reading that prophecy in the synagogue was challenged by Rabbi Eliezer on the spot: *"If you are willing to publicly attack the integrity of the Jewish people in Jerusalem, your own integrity deserves scrutiny."* And indeed, upon examination, his lineage turned out to be questionable.

The Maharil and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 428:8) both codify the preference for the Amos reading, and the Mishna Berura confirms that the reasoning is precisely the discomfort with the harshness of the Kedoshim haftarah's language toward the Jewish people of Jerusalem.

What happens in the rare case when Acharei Mot and Kedoshim are read separately, each requiring its own haftarah? In practice, this rarely occurs. Whenever the two parashiyot fall on different Shabbatot, one of them almost always coincides with either Rosh Chodesh or Shabbat HaGadol, each carrying its own special haftarah that effectively displaces the standard reading and leaves room for Amos. But in the exceptional case when each parsha does need its own independent haftarah, the *Mishnah Berurah* (428:26) rules that there is no choice: Kedoshim must revert to its traditional Ezekiel reading, which focuses on the failures of the Jewish people.

Nevertheless, a contrary custom developed within the *Yishuv Hayashan* (the disciples of the Vilna Gaon that made up the Haredi community of Jerusalem in the early twentieth century). Rabbinic figures of that era, including Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, took the position that one should never read a haftara that speaks ill of Jerusalem under any circumstances. Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap, rabbi of the celebrated Beit Knesset HaGra in Jerusalem, acted on this principle, citing the directive of his mentor Rav Shmuel Salant, the revered spiritual leader of Jerusalem's Ashkenazi community. Rav Charlap held that even when Kedoshim falls alone, he would read the selection from Amos, *"Halo khivnei khushiim,"* even if it meant repeating a haftarah that had already been read the previous week.

A moving story illustrates this impulse. One Shabbat, the regular baal koreh, who came faithfully every week to lein (read) the Torah portion and the haftarah, did not appear. Rav Charlap dispatched a messenger to his home. The reply came back: the reader had gone to pray at a different synagogue, fearing that Rav Charlap might on that particular Shabbat feel halakhically compelled to direct him to read the passage about Jerusalem's failings – and he could not bring himself to be the one to publicly read those words. Rav Charlap's response was immediate: He, too, would never read such a haftarah under any circumstances.

That episode, so small in its setting, carries an outsized message. Centuries of rabbinic tradition converge on a single principle: **We are willing to bend standard protocols, to set aside prescribed sequences, and to depart from established norms, rather than allow the integrity of the Jewish people and the citizens of Jerusalem to be publicly called into question. In our own day, when Israel's citizens are offering extraordinary sacrifice – in blood, in sleepless nights, in interrupted lives and shattered families – that principle is especially urgent. The courage and integrity of the people of Israel and Jerusalem are not to be condemned. They are to be celebrated and defended, in the beit kneset as in the public square.** [emphasis added]

Shabbat Shalom

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-acharei-mot-kedoshim-rabbi-brander-5786/>

This Yom HaZikaron, Silence Will Speak

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

When the siren wails across the country on Yom HaZikaron – Israel's Memorial Day — I hear it as a cry; like a shofar, it is a prayer beyond words.

This year — our third Memorial Day since October 7, with Israel still at war and losses continuing — words feel especially elusive. What remains is the sound of silence, deep pain and heartbreak.

We are reminded of Aaron the High Priest, who stood in silence after his sons were tragically killed: “And Aaron held his peace,” reads the book of Leviticus. Shocked, broken, confused, and justifiably angry, Aaron did not speak. No words could articulate the protest or justify the pain.

We in Israel are absorbing the intensity of the moment and its full, incomprehensible weight. We grapple with grief, memory, and longing; we struggle to express what we feel. Everything feels blurred. We are silent because there are no words large enough to contain the depth of loss. Words are empty in the face of such pain.

At the same time, we have questions. Eicha? How could this happen? While we have all seen the hand of God on a daily basis, we have justifiable grievances. We have criticism. We are confused. But in the face of such loss and suffering, asking questions when it is impossible to find answers is futile. So silence becomes the default. It feels louder than the siren.

I have come to understand that this silence has power. The tragedies of the last few years have changed the nation and world Jewry. We are not silent simply because we lack answers. We are silent because what we are witnessing defies description. The magnitude of sacrifice of those we honor, their selflessness and courage, has revealed something about this country and our people that speech cannot adequately capture. Our youth are leaping into action, whether for military service or for community volunteering, with a sense of purpose and love that leaves us speechless. Har Herzl and all the military cemeteries grow larger with superheroes whose devotion humbles us. Citizens of Israel have redefined what it means to love this country. While this is obvious to all, it cannot be adequately formalized in words. In this wordless space, we sanctify not only our grief and our befuddlement, but a reverence for what these men and women have shown the world about who we are.

Jewish tradition has always appreciated such silence. According to Jewish law, visitors to a house of mourning refrain from conversing with the mourner, and especially asking questions, until the mourner speaks to them. We sit beside them, present but quiet. These actions enable us to engage and support, even when words fail us.

The siren of Yom HaZikaron is another such ritual. For two minutes, the nation stands together in complete stillness, providing relief from the pressure of having to find the words for the overwhelming feelings of grief, questions, and boundless appreciation. We can just feel and remember, without having to talk. In a society so often divided by words, silence becomes the one language that we can all share.

This year, as Israel continues to live with strain, anxiety, and uncertainty, that quiet becomes not only meaningful, but necessary. It allows us to cope, to make it through the day. It frees us from the impossible task of finding the right words to adequately express our gratitude and admiration for those who have given their lives for this country, and for their families who carry that loss forward.

This year, we need not force speech. It is not what we say that honors them, but what we are willing to feel together in silence.

* Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, an Israel-based network of 32 educational and social action programs transforming Jewish life, living and leadership in Israel and across the world. He is the rabbi emeritus of the Boca Raton Synagogue and founder of the Katz Yeshiva High School. He served as the Vice President for University and Community Life at Yeshiva University and has authored many articles in scholarly journals. Rabbi Brander first presented this article as a blog on April 20, 2026, Erev Yom HaZikaron (Israeli Memorial Day), in The Times of Israel.

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/this-yom-hazikaron-silence-will-speak/>

Kedoshim: All the Rest is Commentary!

By Rabbi Label Lam * © 5763

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

When a potential convert approached Hillel and asked to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot, Hillel summarized as follows, *“That which is hateful to you do not do to others. All the rest is commentary. Now go and learn.”* (Shabbos 31A)

Is that in fact the entire Torah? That may be a key to commandments between man and man. What about the many Mitzvos between man and G-d? Where do Tefillin, Mezuzah, Kashrus, Blessings and the like fit into Hillel’s paradigm of “the entire Torah”?

Harry was down on his luck and struggling financially. He went to an old friend Mike for some help. Mike was sitting pretty and enjoying great personal success. Sensing Harry’s desperation, without hesitation, Mike went to the phone and in moments achieved what Harry had been struggling to accomplish for too many months. He landed him a job. Harry was so happy to get even this ground level position. Over the years he worked his way up to top management and eventually had enough personal experience and capital to start his own company. He succeeded in a big way.

In the meantime, Mike’s industry started to slump, and he found himself without income for almost a year. He was already deep in debt and desperate. Not knowing where to turn, he went to his old friend Harry, whom he had helped back when. Harry welcomed him into his lavish office and heard his sad story. Recalling that Mike had been the one who had made that phone call in his hour of need, he reached deep into his pocket and fished around till he came up with a quarter. *“That phone call must have cost you about a quarter!”* He handed it to him, and then had him escorted out!

What do you think when we hear such a story? It makes your blood boil. What an ingrate! How could someone be so callous and so insensitive, so unappreciative? Right? I think that’s everybody’s natural reaction! What a bum! What a no good-nik that Harry guy! Everyone understands and appreciates the moral imperative of gratitude.

Every mother at the barber’s shop reminds her little boy, *“Say thank you to the man, Phillip! Take the lollipop out and say it*

so he can hear you!” The barber is happy to get his twelve dollars and a tip. Who’s the “thank you” for? It’s for the benefit of the kid! He needs to develop, for his own basic humanity, an ever-deepening sense of gratitude.

Now if that’s what is expected for a haircut, or for a job reference, what language is left when great thanks are owed? Let’s say you negotiated a fellow’s release from a hopelessly long prison sentence. You buy him a wardrobe. You give him a car. You land him a job. You build him a house. You find him a wife. All you ask for is some token remembrances. Put a sign by the door with my name inscribed somewhat inconspicuously. Use only certain fuels in the car. Call me and leave me a message. I want to know how you’re doing. Follow scrupulously the guidelines in the marriage manual. Work honestly. Be happy. Be exemplary. Remember you represent me! It’s a lot but it’s not too much! Is it? Now, how would we feel if our beneficiary defaulted on these requests?

What if we became aware and even convinced that some “One” has given us not just a haircut but a head, not just a livelihood but a life? Wouldn’t we want to know how to begin to say “thank you”? Now, **all the rest is commentary!**

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-kedoshim/>

Acharei-Mot: Holy Imperfection

By Rabbi Dov Linzer*

Rosh Yeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2016, 2019

Acharei-Mot details the special avodah, the sacrificial rites, that the High Priest performed on Yom Kippur to affect atonement for the Jewish people. However, as the Vilna Gaon noted in Kol Eliyahu, the Torah only introduces the connection to Yom Kippur at the very end of the lengthy description of this special avodah. The framing of the avodah is not what must be done to achieve atonement on Yom Kippur, but rather, what must be done when Aharon wants to enter the inner sanctum: “*Speak to Aharon your brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place inside the veil before the covering, which is upon the ark; that he die not; for I will appear in the cloud upon the covering*” (Vayikra 16:2).

Thus, says the Vilna Gaon, this is a rite that the High Priest — or, according to the Gaon, specifically Aharon — could perform any time he wanted to enter the Holy of Holies so that he would not die as his sons had, provided that the ritual was followed precisely. Understood this way, the parasha is underscoring the dangers of unbridled religious passion, of approaching God without due care and caution; it gives a very structured way that one — the High Priest in this case — can channel his desire for intense, intimate connection.

This approach makes the avodah a tool for the High Priest’s realization of his religious yearnings, but it does not address larger communal issues. It also does not reflect the simple sense of the Torah, which mandates communal sacrifices for the avodah and declares that it will cleanse the Mikdash and atone for the people. It seems that while the emphasis of the avodah is not on Yom Kippur, it is also not on the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies. Yes, he must enter it, but this is a means, not an end. What, then, is the end goal? The Torah tells us in the climactic verses after the High Priest exits the inner sanctum:

And he shall make atonement (vi'khiper) for the holy place, from the uncleanness of the people of Israel, and from their transgressions in all their sins; and so shall he do for the Tent of Meeting, that remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness. And there shall be no man in the Tent of Meeting when he goes in to make atonement (li'khaber), in the holy place, until he comes out, having made atonement, (vi'khiper) for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel (Vayikra 16:16–17).

The goal is not the entering itself, not the religious experience for its own sake. Neither is the goal primarily for bringing atonement and forgiveness for the Children of Israel. The goal is atoning for the Sanctuary. Well, not atoning exactly, for what atonement does the Sanctuary need? The term used here is kaper, which more precisely means cleansing, not atoning. **The Sanctuary must be cleansed from the defilement it has endured as a result of the sins of Israel.** Sins, according to the Torah, create a type of tumah. Sin defiles both the person who performs it and the person’s surroundings. And how much more does it defile the Sanctuary, the place of the Presence of God? [emphasis added]

Thus this avodah must be performed to cleanse the Sanctuary and to cleanse the people. Its central sacrifices are chatat, generally translated as “*sin-offerings*,” but more accurately translated as “*cleansing sacrifices*.” This is why certain tamei people, such as women who have given childbirth, must bring a chatat. **Not because they have sinned, but because the chatat achieves a cleansing of tumah** (see Sotah 15a). [emphasis added]

The focus is not on the sin itself but on its impact, its defilement, and the sin-offerings, or rather, the cleansing-offerings, restore the world to its previous state. They restore the person to how she was before this sin affected her and God’s Sanctuary to how it was, allowing God’s Presence to continue dwelling among the People.

Now, it is worth asking how this cleansing is achieved and how it can be effective. Isn’t tumah the antithesis of the Sanctuary? Why, then, does the tumah not drive God’s Presence out of the Sanctuary? The question is sharpened further when we realize that, of all that can invalidate sacrifices, tumah is the problem that can most be tolerated. The Talmud (Menachot 25a) teaches that the tzitz the High Priest wore on his forehead allowed sacrifices that were tamei to be acceptable after the fact. And fixed-time sacrifices could be brought despite tumah: *tumah hutra bi’tzibbur*. If it can so easily be tolerated, why, then, is tumah the very thing that must be driven from the Temple?

The answer relates to the very nature of the Temple, to God choosing to have God’s Presence dwell among the people of Israel. On the one hand, tumah is the antithesis of kedusha, and having a Mikdash creates a heavy demand that we do everything in our ability to keep tumah at bay. But because we are not God, **because we are human, tumah is an inevitable part of our lives**. This is certainly true in terms of the ritual tumah that has been the focus of Vayikra: animals die, people die, women give birth to children, women menstruate, and men have seminal emissions. Such tumah is encountered every day. But perhaps more significantly, it is also true about tumah that it is a result of sin. **To be human is to sin. No matter how valiant our attempts to prove otherwise, to be human is to produce tumah**. [emphasis added]

So if tumah and sin are inevitable consequences of our human existence, how can God continue to dwell among us? Simply put, God wishes it to be so. When, after the sin of the Golden Calf, God accedes to Moshe’s request that God continue to dwell among the people, God agreed to accept the reality of human sin and to dwell among us regardless. For our part, we must do all we can to keep tumah away, but even when we do not, God continues to dwell among us. This is what is both acknowledged and addressed by the Yom Kippur avodah. God has given us this to allow us to be forgiven and to start fresh. And hence, this verse of cleansing the Temple ends with an acknowledgement of the inevitability of tumah: “*And so he shall do to the Tent of Meeting that dwells in their midst, in the midst of their impurity.*”

Of all the verses that speak about God dwelling (*shakhen*) among the Children of Israel, this is the only one that emphasizes not that tumah must be kept at a distance, but that, **despite our best efforts, tumah will always be present to some degree**. And this acknowledgement comes exactly in the section of the Torah that speaks to **how tumah can be tolerated: because God has agreed to tolerate it, God has accepted our humanity**, and, to make the tumah manageable, God has given us a rite to cleanse the Temple and start over each year. [emphasis added]

Of course, we cannot allow this Divine tolerance to undermine our awareness of God’s presence. If tumah becomes the norm, then the place will no longer be one of kedusha. This is how the tzitz allows tumah to be tolerated. The tzitz, with the words *kodesh la’Hashem*, “*Holy to God*,” worn on the forehead of the Kohen Gadol, tamid, continually, is a symbol of the continual consciousness of the Divine Presence. If in the presence of tumah the consciousness of the Divine Presence remains firm, then the tumah will be tolerated.

This, in turn, is why only the Kohen Gadol can affect the necessary cleansing. The Kohen Gadol, who symbolizes the constant awareness of God’s Presence, does the rites of the Yom Kippur avodah without wearing the tzitz because such a reminder is not necessary. When the Kohen Gadol enters into the Holy of Holies he is not only reminded of God; he is in direct contact with the Divine Presence. It is this connection to God, achieved through constant mindfulness and awareness, which reaches its apex on Yom Kippur. It is this connection to God that allows tumah not to undermine God’s Presence, but to be tolerated and cleansed. “*With this Aharon may enter the holy place*”; he may concretize the connection to God so that the Temple and the people may be cleansed.

Tumah, in its essence, is the very thing that distances us from God, but if we work to keep God in the forefront of our consciousness, to have *kodesh la’Hashem* inscribed on our forehead, then it will be tolerated, and God will be close to us

despite our tumah. God, Who dwells among them, despite their impurity.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

From my archives

Parshat Kedoshim: Holiness In Plain Sight

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

The opening command of Parshat Kedoshim — “You shall be holy” — is a foundational theme in Chassidiut. For many, this command suggests asceticism or a retreat from the messiness of human existence. But according to the students of the Baal Shem Tov, the call to holiness is not an invitation to escape life; it is a summons to deepen our engagement with it. A more precise translation of the command might be: “*You shall be sacred.*”

There is a vital distinction between a restrictive view of holiness and the Chassidic model of sacredness. To be “*holy*” in a classical sense often implies a circumvention of corporeality, treating physical needs and desires as obstacles to be suppressed. In contrast, the Chassidic religious trajectory is situated squarely within materiality. God is transcendental, but we are not. In fact, the Midrash says as much. On the verse “Be holy because I Hashem am holy,” the Midrash wonders, “*Could it be that our holiness is like God’s?*” To which it answers: “*My holiness is distinct from your sacredness.*” This distinction is rooted in the fact that Divine holiness is transcendent, while our human sacredness is immanent, achieved not by negating the body, but by sanctifying it.

This Chassidic trajectory finds strong support in Chazal. The Rabbis state, “the Divine Presence dwells within the intimacy between a husband and wife” (Sotah 17a). This assertion, placing God’s presence at the heart of a physical human encounter, powerfully reinforces the vision of immanent Kedusha.

This Talmudic teaching is more than a comment on marital life; it is a foundational theological assertion regarding Divine immanence. If God’s Presence is encountered at the core of a sensual, physical act, then Kedusha can manifest in all relational contexts. Every interaction — with family, colleagues, or even a stranger — becomes a potential site for sacredness, expressed through depth of attention and genuine care. God is not found in the avoidance of the material encounter, but right at its center. Kedusha is achieved by immersing ourselves in the world and lifting it up.

This commitment to finding God within the material world is the ultimate destination of the spiritual life, a goal reinforced by Chazal. The 2nd-century sage R. Pinchas ben Yair developed a famous sequence of spiritual development (*Avodah Zarah* 20b). This “ladder” envisions a step-by-step ascent: from studying Torah to achieving *zehirut* (carefulness), leading through *zerizut* (alacrity), *prishut* (separateness), and *taharah* (purity), finally culminating in *Kedusha*. This deliberate placement of Kedusha at the apex signifies that true sacredness is not a starting point or a mystical jump, but the result of a life built with meticulous intention. It is through the aggregation of everyday habits — attention, honesty, and restraint — that we build our way up the ladder to achieve this ultimate, transformative state of sacredness.

Sacredness, however, is multidimensional. While it is the culmination of R. Pinchas ben Yair’s ladder, it is also accessible in the small pauses of daily life, such as a peaceful walk, a pleasant conversation with a close friend, a meaningful Shabbat meal, immersion in a religious text, or getting lost in a beautiful tune or meaningful lyrics. The common denominator is that these moments provide transcendence, allowing us to mentally pause our mundane routines and enter a transcendental space. When we return from these pauses, we feel vivified and refreshed, having experienced moments of intimacy with the Divine.

Life without these pauses would be a grinding, mechanical existence. As parents, teachers, and partners, the most beautiful gift we can offer is equipping our children, students, and loved ones with the skills and opportunities to enter into and create sacred spaces. This means ensuring they not only have access to Kedusha but are also equipped with the spiritual

vocabulary necessary to name it. By naming the sacred in the mundane, we help translate a simple walk or a shared meal into an encounter with the Divine. Providing this access is a profound act of love; it builds a bridge between the physical and the transcendental, allowing those we care for to find lasting significance within the fabric of their material lives.

Ultimately, the message of Parshat Kedoshim is a call to live with profound intention. The demand is not that we become transcendent angels who escape the world, but that we become fully present humans who transform it. Our Kedusha is located not in the avoidance of the physical, but in its sanctification. By accepting the immanence of the Divine within our relationships and routines, we actualize the highest point of the spiritual ladder. Moments of attention, honesty, and care are the raw material through which we build a life awake to the Presence of God already within the world. This is the sacred work: to find the holy, not by looking away, but by looking deep within the world we already inhabit.

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<https://library.yctorah.org/2026/04/parshat-kedoshim-holiness-in-plain-sight/>

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* Rabbi Marc D. Angel is founder and Director. He is also rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Angel for Shabbat: Aharei Mot/Kedoshim

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In his book, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, Dr. Oliver Sacks discusses his meeting with a remarkable autistic teenager. To get a sense of the boy's abilities, he spread a jigsaw puzzle on a table and asked the boy to put it together. He did so quickly and correctly. Then Dr. Sacks put down another jigsaw puzzle with all the pieces face down so the boy could not have the picture to assist him. He put this puzzle together just as quickly as the first! (p. 211).

A thought struck me: it is possible to put all the pieces together correctly and still not see the picture. Extrapolating to religious life, one can learn and observe Judaism as discreet pieces of a puzzle but miss the picture.

The "whole picture" is suggested in this week's Torah reading: "And you shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy." It is further evidenced in the instruction in Exodus for the Israelites to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." On both the personal and communal levels, we are to strive to maintain holy lives. This entails living in the presence of God, knowing that our lives have transcendent meaning, that we are to be models of piety and righteousness. Everything we do must be geared toward this over-arching goal.

Each piece of the puzzle — each of our deeds — is part of the picture. When we are so busy with the tasks and pressures of daily life, we may get lost in the details and lose the picture.

A rabbinic parable tells of a poor man who was struggling to support his family. He learned of a faraway land that was filled with precious jewels. A ship would soon be leaving for this land but would only return after an interval of unspecified length. His wife agreed that he should make the voyage, so as to be able to obtain valuable jewels to bring back to support his family in wealth and honor.

The man boarded the ship and was off to make his fortune. Sure enough, the ship arrived at the faraway land and indeed the earth was covered with diamonds and all types of precious stones. He hurriedly filled his pockets with jewels and was now an extraordinarily rich man. He rejoiced in the thought of how wealthy he and his family would be upon his return home.

But in the faraway land, the man soon realized that his precious stones were valueless. They were so abundant that no one paid any attention to them. None of the storekeepers would accept them as payment for merchandise. Rather, the currency of this land was wax candles. Everyone strove to accumulate as many wax candles as possible.

The man worked hard and accumulated a large number of wax candles. He emptied his pockets and bags of the diamonds, rubies and emeralds. In this new land, he became wealthy and prominent – very successful.

Time passed. It was now time for the man to return to his wife and family. He boarded the ship, laden with as many candles as he could carry.

When he arrived home, his wife eagerly greeted him. She asked to see the treasures he had brought back. Proudly, the man opened his bags and emptied his pockets. He stacked up piles of wax candles. His wife was astonished. *"You spent all that time in the faraway land, a land filled with precious jewels, and you brought back only piles of worthless wax candles?"*

Suddenly, the man realized he had made a terrible mistake. When he had arrived in the faraway land, he knew he was supposed to gather precious gems – but he had soon forgotten his mission. Influenced by the people in that land, he had come to value candles and ignore jewels. He had thought that by accumulating candles, he had become successful. But now that he had returned home, he realized that he had missed his opportunity to bring back real treasures.

We are placed on earth to attain transcendent treasures – wisdom, love, spiritual insight, moral courage, Torah and mitzvot. If we can keep our lives focused on these goals, we can return to our heavenly home with genuine treasures. But in this world, people chase after "wax candles" – material wealth, glitz, hedonistic lifestyles. People are swayed by prevalent ideas and values. It is possible to lose sight of our real treasures and goals. When we finally return home – to our heavenly home beyond – we may realize that we are bringing with us "wax candles" instead of precious jewels – that we had lived our lives chasing falsehoods and vanities rather than pursuing goodness, truth and piety.

"And you shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy." "And you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Keep the "whole picture" in mind.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Paired Perspectives on the Parashah: Kedoshim
Kedoshim: What Is Holiness?
By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

The opening half of the Book of Leviticus revolves around a single sacred center: the Mishkan, Tabernacle. Chapters 1–7

detail the sacrificial system; chapters 8–10 describe the dedication of the Mishkan, alongside the tragic cautionary tale of Nadab and Abihu, who approached improperly. Chapters 11–15 delineate who may not enter the Mishkan, and how one may regain access through purification. Finally, chapter 16 outlines the purification of the Mishkan itself, ensuring that God's presence can continue to dwell among Israel.

Beginning in chapter 17, however, the Torah pivots. The focus shifts from sacred space to sacred life. The laws of chapters 17–26 extend holiness into every sphere of existence — dietary practice, interpersonal ethics, sexuality, ritual observance, and beyond. Already in Leviticus 11:44-45, within the earlier section, the Torah introduces the foundational principle: “*You shall be holy, for I am holy.*” This refrain reappears as a governing theme in our parashah (19:2) and beyond (20:7; 21:8).

Yet, we must ask: what does holiness actually mean?

Holiness as Imitation of God

The Torah's central formulation — “*You shall be holy, for I am holy*” — defines holiness relationally — as a response to God's own nature. Holiness is not an abstract state, but a call to emulate God. Scripture repeatedly refers to God as *kadosh* (e.g., Isaiah 40:25; 57:15; Habakkuk 3:3), and rabbinic tradition crystallizes this idea through *imitatio Dei*: just as God is compassionate, gracious, and just, so too must human beings strive to embody those traits (Sotah 14a; Shabbat 133b).

On this view, holiness is not confined to ritual precision. It is a mode of living in which one's entire life reflects God's values.

Two Classical Models: Restraint or Refinement

Medieval commentators debate how this ideal is realized in practice.

Rashi, following *Leviticus Rabbah* (24:6), understands holiness primarily as restraint — specifically, refraining from prohibited behavior. This interpretation fits the immediate context of chapters 18-20, which emphasize sexual prohibitions. For Rashi, the root k-d-sh conveys separation: to be holy is to set oneself apart from that which is forbidden. The same root can even describe something “*set aside*” for prostitution (*kedeshah*), underscoring that holiness is fundamentally about designation and separation.

Ramban, however, pushes further. Drawing on *Yevamot* 20a, he argues that one can technically avoid all prohibitions and still live a coarse, self-indulgent life. Such a person, though legally compliant, fails to achieve holiness. For Ramban, holiness is refinement — a disciplined, elevated mode of existence shaped by the spirit, not just the letter, of the law. The commandments aim to cultivate a morally and spiritually refined personality.

Halakhic observance alone does not necessarily produce ethical or spiritual excellence. Yet at the same time, the Torah insists that the path to holiness must pass through the framework of mitzvot.

Ethics at the Center of Holiness

Several nineteenth-century thinkers, including R. Yisrael Salanter, R. Moshe Sofer (Hatam Sofer), R. Hirsch, and Netziv, emphasize that holiness is most visibly expressed in ethical conduct, especially honesty in business and interpersonal integrity. In their view, one's treatment of others is the truest measure of religious life.

This position captures a vital truth — but it risks reduction. Holiness in the Torah is inherently religious and cannot be limited to ethics alone.

Jacob Milgrom therefore offers a more precise formulation: what distinguishes the Torah is not ethics alone, nor ritual alone, but their integration. Ethical conduct is not optional — it is an essential component of holiness alongside ritual observance. Jeremiah Unterman sharpens this point further: in the ancient Near East, legal systems prohibited wrongdoing but did not

mandate active care for the vulnerable. The Torah uniquely mandates care for the vulnerable as an obligation of justice.

Holiness, then, is not only about avoiding harm, but about actively building a just and compassionate society.

Holiness as a National Calling

A striking perspective emerges from Joshua Berman. In Tanakh, individuals are almost never described explicitly as *kadosh*. The lone narrative exception is the Shunammite woman's description of Elisha as an *ish kadosh*, holy man (II Kings 4:9) — and even there, it is her perception, not the Torah's or God's designation.

By contrast, the nation of Israel is repeatedly called a holy nation (*goy kadosh*) beginning at Sinai. The concept of holiness, Berman argues, is fundamentally collective and covenantal. It arises only with the formation of Israel as a nation bound to God through law and mission.

Holiness, in this sense, is not merely personal piety. It is a national identity expressed through shared practices, boundaries, and commitments that distinguish Israel from other nations. Even when applied to individuals — such as priests or Nazirites — holiness is institutional, defined by roles within the broader covenantal system.

This framing yields a powerful corollary: when Israel lives up to its calling, God is sanctified in the world. When it fails, the result is *hillul Hashem*, a desecration of God's name. Holiness is thus both privilege and responsibility, inseparable from the public and national life of the people.

Conclusion: A Multi-Dimensional Ideal

The command “*You shall be holy*” resists reduction to a single definition. It encompasses:

- Separation from the prohibited (Rashi),
- Refinement of character and conduct (Ramban),
- Integration of ritual and ethical life (Milgrom, Unterman),
- Imitation of God's attributes (rabbinic tradition),
- And participation in a national covenantal mission (Berman).

Together, these perspectives reveal that holiness is not a single trait, but a multi-layered religious ideal. **Holiness is not one dimension of religious life — it is its totality.** It demands discipline and aspiration, law and spirit, individual growth and collective identity. Above all, it calls upon Israel to live in such a way that the presence of God is reflected not only in sacred spaces, but in the entirety of life. [emphasis added]

* National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals; Rabbi Angel has taught at Yeshiva University since 1996, and he lectures widely.

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You Are Already a Treasure! by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine*

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

Parshas Kedoshim begins with a fascinating Mitzvah. “*You shall be holy because I [Hashem] am holy.*” What exactly does it mean to be holy?

The human being is comprised of two components: the physical body and the spiritual Nishama. Hashem does not have a body; He is spiritual. The Mitzvah is to develop a relationship with Hashem, to connect with Him. To do so, the Mitzvah calls upon us to be less physically focused and less indulgent. To be more refined and noble. (See Ramban) When you develop your spiritual side you develop G-dlike qualities and will be able to connect better with Hashem.

The simple understanding of this Mitzvah is that we are physical beings and must develop a spiritual component. But in maintaining that perspective we may be shortchanging ourselves.

Rashi references other places where the obligation of Kedusha/ holiness is mentioned. A Kohein, for example, is Kadosh/holy and is therefore held to a higher standard. Likewise, the daughter of a Kohein is holy and must not profane that holiness. These are not examples of people trying to acquire Kedusha. Rather, the person has Kedusha and is commanded to maintain it.

Similarly, Rav Matisyahu Salomon suggests that the Mitzvah to the Jewish people to “Be holy” isn’t a commandment to develop holiness. Rather it is a Mitzvah to protect and preserve the holiness that we already have.

Mr. Irving Bunim was one of the great lay leaders and philanthropists of the previous generation. As a Torah Jew advocating Torah values, he encountered much resistance from people who were being swept up by assimilation and by the trend of melting-pot America.

On one occasion he hosted Rabbi Isaac Sher, a remarkable Torah personality, the son in law of the famed Alter of Slabodka. As Mr. Bunim made breakfast for Rabbi Sher, he inquired how the Rabbi liked his toast, “Gently toasted or well done?” Rabbi Sher replied that he preferred that it be toasted in a way that the inside would be [toasted] just like the outside (melba toast). Bunim proceeded to prepare the bread accordingly and then thoughtfully turned to Rabbi Sher and said, “I wish American Jews were like that, that their inside should be like their outside.”

Rabbi Sher’s reply surprised Bunim. He said, “*No, the challenge with American Jews is that we need their outside to be like their inside. They are good, but too much is getting in the way.*”

The Mitzvah of Kedoshim could be understood as a call for us to develop our spiritual side and become Kadosh/holy. But, more likely, given that we have a Nishama and our ancestors accepted the Torah at Sinai, it is a call to preserve our holiness. So many things lure us to veer off course. Like the Kohein and his daughter who are told to preserve their holiness, the Torah calls to us to preserve the holiness that we were given.

Rabbi A.J. Twerski recounted an incident in which he met with a young woman who had been destroying herself through drugs. As she sat in his office, Rabbi Twerski noticed that she was caressing a locket hung from a chain as a necklace. He asked her about it, and she said that it was a gift from her mother before she died. Rabbi Twerski pulled out a pocketknife and asked, “*Would it be okay if you hand me the locket so I can slash it up a bit?*” A look of horror crossed the woman’s face. “*Noooo,*” she said with heartfelt fervor. It was her only possession from her mother who had passed on.

Rabbi Twerski smiled warmly at her. “*Of course not,*” he said. “*But you need to see yourself also as*

a treasure that must not be damaged. You have slashed your arms up with this drug stuff..." He raised his voice tenderly as he asked, *"But aren't you also a treasure?"*

The Kohein doesn't earn his holiness — he protects it. So do we. Our Nishama was given to us; the Mitzvah is simply not to lose it. The Mitzvah of Kedoshim is not a call to become something new. It is a call to remember what we already are.

For Family Discussion:

- Rabbi Sher said that American Jews don't need their inside to match their outside — they need their outside to match their inside. What do you think he meant? Do you agree?
- What are some things in today's world — social media, peer pressure, busyness — that get "in the way" of our inner goodness, like Rabbi Sher described? How do we deal with those?
- "The Mitzvah of Kedoshim is not a call to become something new. It is a call to remember what we already are." What does your family already have that's worth protecting?

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com.
For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Kedoshim - Hallowed with Holiness

By Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * (2021)

This week's parsha opens with an enigmatic, though beautiful, mitzvah – *"You shall be holy for I am holy"* (Vayikra 19:2). This is undoubtedly a most lofty obligation - to follow G-d's ways and be holy in a manner somehow similar to G-d. But what is holiness? What does it mean to be holy and how do we attain this lofty status?

The Ramba"n (ibid.) quotes a Medrash Toras Kohanim which explains that just as Hashem is separate so too we should be separate. The Ramba"n explains that this concept of separation is referring to a separation from physicality. We understand and recognize G-d's holiness in that He is spiritual and has no physicality, and it is this separation from physicality which we are being commanded to emulate.

The Ramba"n clarifies that this does not mean a separation from the physical world, but rather is defining how we should approach and engage with the physical world. There are many specific actions or activities which the Torah has defined as forbidden. In these parshiyos we have a list of forbidden relationships. A short while ago in Parshas Shemini, we read of a long list of forbidden foods. However, there are many relationships and many foods and drinks which are still permitted. How should we view these items and how should we approach these areas of life? It is to address this question that we are told, *"Be holy"* and separate ourselves.

The Ramba"n explains that if a person would only follow the letter of the law and avoid all forbidden activities they could still live a hedonistic life. One could indulge himself in food and drink with gluttony and even drink himself into a drunken stupor, without ever directly violating a commandment. If one is honest, he could spend his entire life engaged in business and amassing wealth, without ever cheating or stealing or violating any other commandment. However, these lifestyles fall far short from the depth, meaning and joy which Hashem wants us to have in life, both in this world and in the next world. We are, therefore, given this mitzvah to *"be holy"* and separate ourselves from over-indulgence in physical pleasures and

physical pursuits. We should engage appropriately with the permitted areas of our physical lives, but at the same time we must be careful not to over-indulge and lose sight of the true value and purpose of life.

The Ramba"n concludes by explaining that there are many areas where the Torah will give us details and then add one mitzvah which is meant to encapsulate the spirit of the law. This is the mitzvah of *"be holy."* After teaching us of many forbidden physical activities, we are commanded to understand and live by a deeper message – to remember that life has a higher purpose and not to get caught up in physical pursuits. We find a similar idea in the mitzvos regarding monetary law and business law. After many specific mitzvos are given in these areas, we are then commanded *"and you shall do what is just and proper"* (Devarim 6:18). It is not enough to simply follow the letter of the law. We must understand the deeper message and live by it.

In addition to the powerful lesson the Ramba"n is teaching us on where we should focus our efforts and our goals in life, I believe there is a powerful lesson about our humanity in his words. The Ramba"n tells us that we can attain a status of holiness by separating from excessive physicality, or in other words – by simply abstaining and holding back. Holiness is not defined by what we do, but rather by what we don't do. What makes us holy is our ability to hold back and to abstain from indulgence. Holiness is achieved by recognizing that one has something more and does not need the physicality before him. Holiness is expressed by our equanimity and our self-control and by our ability to rise above our challenges and maintain our standards.

The Ramba"n is teaching us the true beauty of this mitzvah. We must understand that we have a nobility and sanctity within ourselves that is far greater than anything the physical world can offer us. We must rise above our physical goals and seek a higher road, to recognize the G-dly soul within us and truly *"be holy."*

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim: Be Unique – For I Am!

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them: You shall be holy; for I YHWH your God, am holy.

The word קדוש is traditionally translated as holy. The more meticulous commentators explain that קדוש means separate, designated, set aside. Consequently, all which is sacred is also קדוש because it must be set apart and not accessed by all. In that sense, the opening verse of Parashat Kedoshim is understood as saying that just as God is set apart from the world, so devout Israelites must separate themselves from the rest of the people, from the nations, and from the crowd. According to Nahmanides, the process of separation continues within the nation, as those who want to be spiritually elevated take upon themselves additional measures of abstinence and religious practices.

This interpretation raises several problems:

1. Immediately following the imperative "be holy!" the Torah lists forbidden actions along desired ones. Most of them are natural laws, preached, if not practically followed, by most civilized societies. Nowhere in this portion or in the Bible can we find support for the idea of

"abstain even from the things which are allowed."

2. In Exodus (19:6), God refers to the Israelites as *"a kingdom of priests."* Since the role of a priest is to teach and promulgate knowledge of the Torah, as stated by Malachi (2:7), this designation means that just as the Kohanim are the spiritual leaders of the nation, so the nation should become a spiritual guidelight for the whole world. This idea is also supported by the famous words of Isaiah (2:3) and Micah (4:2): *"...many nations will say, let us ascend the mount of the*

God of Jacob, so He will teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths.” How can we succeed in that mission if we become aloof and search for ways to be better than others?

3. The interpretation of קָדוֹשׁ as holy suggests a level of separation between factions of the nation and between individuals, but the language of the whole chapter is one of friendship and connectivity. To illustrate that, here is the list of words which refer to different segments of the nation and the family in the first 18 verses of chapter 19:

All the congregation of the children of Israel; mother and father; the poor and the sojourner; your companion; your friend; a hired worker; a deaf person; a blind person; a poor person; an important person; your tribesmen; your friend; your brother; your companion; your fellow men... and the culmination “love the other as you love yourself.”

This list shows without doubt that the theme of the chapter is inclusivity and friendship, rather than the creation of a holy, elitist religious group.

I would therefore suggest a different interpretation of קָדוֹשׁ, one which is in line with its original Hebrew context – unique. Verse 19:2 will be translated thus:

Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel and tell them: you shall be unique, for I, God, am unique!

Already the early Mishnaic scholars emphasized the idea of an individual’s uniqueness. Talmud Yerushalmi (Berakhot 9:1) mentions a special blessing recited upon seeing a great multitude:

blessed is the Master of Secrets [who created so many people], each with a unique face, each with a unique personality.

This blessing, as other statements in Rabbinical literature, relies on the beautiful concept, found in the first chapter of the Torah, that humans were created in the image of God.

Throughout human history, the uniqueness of the individual was challenged and suppressed by monarchs, tyrants, and totalitarian regimes. Today, we would like to think that, at least in developed countries, such oppression has all but disappeared, and that if it exists it is limited to religious movements which indoctrinate their followers into thoughtless adherence to a clear-cut ideology. Sadly, this is not the case. Though we made significant progress in the ability of mankind to understand and respect differences and otherness, our society, even in countries we would like to think of as modern, is fragmented and stratified. We equate unity with uniformity, and therefore seek to conceal or erase differences. When we fail, we often shut ourselves in a bubble of people who are like us, either physically, religiously, or intellectually, and find there our refuge of unity.

This rejection of human individuality stems from fear and from the inability to appreciate and digest our multifaceted, and sometimes insane, human experience. I have recently found that fear expressed by Yuval Noah Harari, a professor of history at Hebrew University and a best-selling author. In his book *Homo Deus*, Harari argues for a new understanding of mankind, one which makes us nothing more than a random collection of wires, neurons, and chemical reactions. Our experiences, he claims, are all subjective, and there is no objective entity or personality which could be described as human. Harari goes on to predict the end of humanity as we know it, and its replacement by improved cyborgs. Harari’s scientific-philosophical treatise is nothing less than a new way to oppress human creativity and individuality by making them insignificant. The Torah guides us not to be swayed by ancient or modern ideologues. Each individual is, as the word indicates, indivisible and unique. This understanding leads to an appreciation of one’s own talents and gifts, and to the nurturing of self-esteem and a sense of purpose and fulfilment. It is then extended towards the rest of humanity, as we realize that all others are unique as well.

Shabbat Shalom.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

This week's parashot are Acharei Mot and Kedoshim, which translate to "after they died" and "holiness" or together, "*after the holy ones died.*" The parasha begins by describing what happened after the two sons of Aharon passed away. It feels especially appropriate as we come out of Yom HaZikaron, when we remember all those who fought and gave their lives for the safety of our homeland.

I would like to repeat what I shared at the ceremony on Tuesday night. As a nation, we carry so much loss. We feel every individual who is killed in war or terror. **This Yom HaZikaron, we commemorated 30,961 soldiers, police officers, and civilians. We often speak about this as the price we pay for having a homeland.**

But at the same time, just last week we commemorated the cost of not having a homeland, the 6,000,000. In comparison, over 78 years we have lost 30,961 lives. That number is equivalent to about three days in the Treblinka concentration camp in 1942.

We moved from that deep sorrow directly into the celebrations of what those sacrifices have given us. And this is reflected in the parasha itself. **After the death of his sons, how does Aharon respond? Does he fall into the endless void of grief, as would be so natural? No. He rises again and continues to lead the nation.**

And so too do we. We lead our eternal nation forward. We carry with us those who came before us and those who will come after us. From pain and loss, we move toward celebration, toward purpose, and toward preparation for Mashiach and the Geulah, may it come speedily in our time.

I look forward to participating in my first ANZAC day observance, the NZ equivalent of our own Yom Hazikaron. Please make a point to join us this Shabbat and share your relatives military service experience.

[note: emphasis added at various points above]

B'ahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter

Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobiSher> .

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Rav Kook Torah

Acharei Mot: Triple Measure of Incense

A Cloud in the Holy of Holies

The High Priest was only permitted to enter the inner sanctuary of the Temple on one day of the year — on Yom Kippur.

“Tell your brother Aaron that he may not enter the sanctuary behind the partition at any time... so that he may not die, for I appear over the Ark cover in a cloud.” (Lev. 16:2)

What exactly was this cloud inside the Holy of Holies? In Yoma 53a, the Talmud explains that this was a cloud of incense smoke. The ketoret (incense) played a central role in the special service of Yom Kippur. Only after burning the ketoret inside the Holy of Holies was the High Priest allowed to enter, as it says:

“Then he shall take a fire pan full of burning coals... together with two handfuls of finely ground incense... so that the cloud from the incense will envelop the Ark cover.” (Lev. 16:12-13)

What is this special connection between the ketoret and the Yom Kippur service? And why did it need to be finely pulverized to a greater degree than the incense that was offered on other days?

Beyond Time

Once a year, the kohanim would produce enough ketoret for the entire year. They would prepare 368 portions of ketoret — one portion for each day of the year, plus an extra three portions for Yom Kippur. Why did the service on Yom Kippur require an extra three measures of incense?

The central theme of Yom Kippur is teshuvah (repentance) and kapparah (atonement). What is remarkable about these concepts is that they allow us, in a sense, to rewrite the past. Teshuvah is not just about attaining forgiveness for past misdeeds. The Sages taught (Yoma 86b) that there is a level of elevated teshuvah through which *“sins are transformed into merits.”* They further explained that the very day of Yom Kippur, even without the Temple service, provides atonement (Yoma 85b). What gives Yom Kippur this unique ability to transcend time and change history?

The inner essence of the entire year is contained within Yom Kippur. The Torah employs an unusual phrase to describe Yom Kippur: *“once in the year”* (Lev. 16:34). Yom Kippur has a singular quality that illuminates during the entire year. Thus the paradox: the special nature of Yom Kippur appears *achat* — once a year, within the framework of time — but at the same time, it is *ba-shanah* — it influences and elevates the entire year, transcending the normal boundaries of time.

We may distinguish between three aspects of Yom Kippur and its special relationship to time:

The special nature of the day itself with its own unique holiness.

Its ability to repair and redeem the previous year.

Its potential to influence and uplift the coming year.

Since Yom Kippur affects time in three directions — present, past, and future — the Yom Kippur service requires three extra measures of ketoret, in addition to the regular daily quota.

Extra Fine

Why did the ketoret of Yom Kippur need to be finely pulverized when it was prepared on the day before Yom Kippur?

Despite the fact that the scent of incense engages our most refined sense,[1] the daily ketoret is offered within the framework of time and thus relates to our physical reality. But on Yom Kippur, the incense needs to be *dakah min hadakah*. It is returned to the mortar and pounded until it becomes a fine powder. The ketoret of Yom Kippur must match the singular holiness of the day. It must be extraordinarily refined, unfettered by the limitations of physicality and material needs. Only then will the ketoret correspond to Yom Kippur's lofty goals of pure thought and holy aspirations.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Olat Re'iyah* vol. I, pp. 139-141.)

Endnote: *"What is it that the soul enjoys and not the body? It is fragrant smells"* (Berakhot 43b).

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/KEDOSHIM60.htm>

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim: The Sacrificial Crisis (5769, 5770)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi *

"On this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins." Lev. 16: 30

On the holiest day of the year, the Day of Atonement, the holiest of people, the High Priest, entered the holiest of places, the Holy of Holies, and made atonement for all Israel. It was a moment on which the fate of Israel depended. For their destiny depended on God; and God in turn sought their obedience. Yet a sinless nation is inconceivable. That would be a nation of angels, not women and men. So a people needs rituals of collective repentance and remorse, times at which it asks God for forgiveness. That is what the Day of Atonement was when the Temple stood.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to understand the crisis represented by the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in the year 70CE. It was, to be sure, a military and political disaster. That, we have no difficulty in imagining. But it was also a spiritual catastrophe. Judaism and the Jewish people survived. We would not be here otherwise. But that survival was by no means assured at the time. How does a nation defined in terms of a religion centred on the Temple and its sacrifices live on after the loss of its most basic institutions? That is the question of questions.

The destruction of the First Temple was no less tragic. But in those days, Israel had prophets – men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel – who gave the people hope. There were no such prophets in the first century CE. To the contrary, from the time of the Maccabees onwards, prophecy gave way to apocalypse: visions of the end of days far removed from the normal course of history. The prophets, despite the grandeur of their visions, were for the most part political realists. The apocalyptic visionaries were not. They envisaged a metaphysical transformation. The cosmos would be convulsed by violent

confrontation. There would be a massive final battle between the forces of good and evil. As one of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Qumran put it: *“the heavenly host will give forth in great voice, the foundations of the world will be shaken, and a war of the mighty ones of the heavens will spread throughout the world.”*

People foresaw disaster. Josephus tells us about one of them. Four years before the war against Rome, *“at a time of exceptional peace and prosperity,”* a certain Jeshua son of Ananias, *“a very ordinary yokel,”* began to cry *“Woe to Jerusalem”* wherever he went. People beat him; the authorities had him sentenced to corporal punishment; yet he continued his lament undaunted: *“All the time till the war broke out he never approached another citizen or was seen in conversation, but daily as if he had learned a prayer by heart he recited his lament: ‘Woe to Jerusalem’ . . . For seven years and five months he went on ceaselessly, his voice as strong as ever and his vigour unabated,”* until he was killed by a rock flung by a Roman engine during the siege.

What does a nation do in the wake of *“sacrificial crisis,”* the loss of its rituals of atonement? We are in a position to trace this precisely, because of the exceptionally candid confession of one who chose another way, Paul of Tarsus, the first and greatest theologian of Christianity.

Paul tells us that he was obsessed by guilt. He said of himself that he was *“sold as a slave to sin.”* The good he sought to do, he failed to do. The sin he sought to avoid, he committed. The very fact that he was commanded [not] to do something provoked in him the opposite reaction, an overwhelming desire to do it. So powerful was this antinomian streak within him that it led him to conceive of a religion without commands at all – quite unlike the sermon on the mount, in which the founder of Christianity said: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven . . .”*

Paul famously attributed the sinful nature of humanity to the first sin of the first human being, Adam. This sin was lifted by the death of the Messiah. Heaven itself had sacrificed the son of God to atone for the sin of man. God became the High Priest, and His son the sacrifice.

Paul lived and taught shortly before the destruction of the Second Temple, but his teaching – like that of the members of the Qumran sect and Josephus’ visionary Jeshua – fully anticipates that catastrophe and constitutes a pre-emptive response to it. What would happen when there were no more physical sacrifices to atone for the guilt of the nation? In their place, for Paul, would come the metaphysical sacrifice of the son-of-God. In Paul, sacrifice is transcendentalized, turned from an event in time and space to one beyond time and space, operative always.

Judaism could not take this route, for many reasons. First, because the message of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) is that God does not allow us (let alone Him) to sacrifice sons. Second, because not one, but all, members of the people of the covenant are sons or daughters of God: *“My child, My firstborn, Israel”* (Exodus 4:22). Third, because despite the many messianic movements to which it has given rise, the Jewish answer to the question, *“Has the Messiah come?”* is always, *“Not Yet.”* While there is still violence and injustice in the world, we cannot accept the consolation of believing that we live in a post-messianic age.

Only against this background can we appreciate the astonishing leap implicit in the famous statement of Rabbi Akiva:

Rabbi Akiva said: Happy are you, Israel. Who is it before whom you are purified and who purifies you? Your Father in heaven. As it is said: And I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean. And it further says: You hope of Israel, the Lord. Just as a fountain purifies the impure, so does the Holy One, blessed be He, purify Israel.

According to Rabbi Akiva specifically, and rabbinic thought generally, in the absence of a Temple, a High Priest and sacrifices, all we need to do is repent, to do teshuvah, to acknowledge our sins, to commit ourselves not to repeat them in the future, and to ask God to forgive us. Nothing else is required: not a Temple, not a priest, and not a sacrifice. **God Himself purifies us. There is no need for an intermediary. What Christianity transcendentalized, Judaism**

democratized. As the Yiddish dramatist S. Ansky put it: Where there is true turning to God, every person becomes a priest, every prayer a sacrifice, every day a Day of Atonement and every place a Holy of Holies. [emphasis added]

This really was the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity. At stake were two quite different ways of understanding the human person, the nature of sin, the concept of guilt and its atonement, and the mediated or unmediated relationship between us and God. Judaism could not accept the concept of “*original sin*” since Jeremiah and Ezekiel had taught, six centuries before the birth of Christianity, that sin is not transferred across the generations. Nor did it need a metaphysical substitute for sacrifice, believing as it did in the words of the Psalmist (Ps. 51:17): “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*” We are all sons or daughters of God, who is close to all who call Him in truth. That is how one of the greatest tragedies to hit the Jewish people led to an unprecedented closeness between God and us, unmediated by a High Priest, unaccompanied by any sacrifice, achieved by nothing more or less than turning to God with all our heart, asking for forgiveness and trusting in His love.

Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I normally select an earlier Devar. No footnotes have been preserved for this Dvar Torah.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/acharei-mot/the-sacrificial-crisis/>

The Effects of Emotional Trauma

By Yossi Ives *

Sometimes we come across a statement that truly perplexes us. The following ruling of Maimonides,¹ based on the Talmud,² is one such statement:

Anyone who robs another person of even a tiny amount,³ it is as if he took his life away from him. As indeed it is written,⁴ “*Such is the fate of all who are greedy for money; it takes the life of its owner.*”⁵

We can all understand that it is wrong to rob someone, even if the amount is small. The amount is not the issue; it is immoral to take someone’s property.

But murder? However criminal it may be to steal, how can that be compared to assassinating someone? One can always retrieve money, but once a life is lost, it is gone forever. Money is only a means to an end; a life, however, has intrinsic and infinite value. How can it be said that robbery is analogous to taking a life?

Commentators have struggled to explain this teaching. Commenting on the Talmudic teaching upon which this is based, Tosafot⁶ states that the comparison to murder refers to a case where the person is starving and has no means by which to obtain food, and this coin is the only money he has. Stealing this coin will result in his death. Evidently, Tosafot had a slightly different text of the Talmud that does not read “*anyone who robs,*” as Maimonides quotes it. According to Tosafot, it does not apply to “*anyone,*” only someone who robs a person who is extremely poor.

This does not help explain Maimonides’ statement that includes any act of robbery — regardless of whether the victim is rich or poor.

Moreover, it is clear from Tosafot that he applies this comparison not only to robbery, but also to other acts of unethically relieving a person of his possessions. In Tosafot’s view, obtaining benefit from another person through theft or cheating is equally compared to murder if the victim is now deprived of the ability to sustain himself.

By contrast, Maimonides limits his ruling to someone who is robbed (having one’s possessions seized from one’s person), excluding other immoral acts of acquisition. This compounds the difficulty: why is robbery compared to murder, while similar acts of theft are not?

To resolve this, the Rebbe points to the continuation of the ruling by Maimonides, which also leaves us incredulous:

Nevertheless (despite the severity of the robbery that it is compared to murder), if the item robbed is no longer in existence, and the robber wishes to repent and comes of his own accord and returns the value of the ill-begotten item, the sages instituted a rule that we do not accept the money from him (but allow him to keep it). Rather, we help him and forgive him the money he owes so as to make the path of repentance as accessible as possible. The sages made clear their displeasure of anyone who accepts money from a penitent.

Is this not astonishing? Here we are told that robbing money is akin to slaying someone, only to be informed that if the aggressor has remorse we go to the other extreme and let him off the hook completely?

This must mean, the Rebbe explains, that by choosing to return what he stole, he corrects whatever wrong he had previously caused. How so? The Rebbe offers a perceptive psychological insight. Robbery refers to someone attacking another person and forcibly seizing his or her possessions. It is an act of violence and aggression that violates the victim. The money stolen is secondary; the bigger issue is that the victim's dignity has been desecrated. This leaves a deep trauma that can hurt long after the financial impact has been forgotten.

In recent decades we have come to properly understand the impact of crime on the victim. We now know how being attacked can leave the victim feeling helpless and vulnerable. Victims of such crimes are known to experience grief, despair, mistrust and anxiety, often for many years. The amount of which one is robbed has no bearing on the traumatic effect. Hence, Maimonides rules that even if the robber stole only a small amount, the offense is equally terrible.

Now we understand how this kind of attack can be compared to murder. Of course, it is not murder, and not in any way as severe. But the psychological harm it can cause is sufficiently acute that it is in some sense like "taking the person's life."

Victims of violent crime often report that they feel the attack "ruined their life" or "stole their peace of mind." When people ask the victims, "What was taken from you?" they are often told, "It is not the amount that was stolen, but the emotional impact it had on me. I used to be a relaxed, trusting person; now I am anxious and fearful." This is the real consequence of violent crime. It ruins lives.

Now, what if the attacker realizes the error of his ways and decides to face the victim and admit his wrongdoing? This is known as "*restorative justice*." We know that this can have an incredibly positive impact on the victim.

To have his humanity and dignity affirmed by the very person who attacked him is indeed "restorative." It helps the victim heal emotionally. It facilitates psychological healing by restoring trust and reaffirming the integrity of his being.

Thus, Maimonides says, if the robber were to be willing, without any coercion, to step forward to repair the damage he has done, this indeed would restore life to the victim. Of course, it is not the money that will do so, but the willingness of the aggressor to openly take responsibility for his actions.

It is an ironic fact that no person on the planet can do more to help the victim overcome the trauma of his attack than the attacker himself. When the robber apologizes to the victim, the worst of the damage has been repaired.

Thus, in such an instance we do not go after the robber to make him pay for his crime. There is no point going after the former criminal, when he is in the midst of doing the one act that no one else can do, namely, offering a profound and sincere apology.

Adapted from *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 32, *Kedoshim I* (pg. 112-119.)

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Hilchot Gezeila v'Aveida*, ch. 1.
2. *Bava Kama* 119a.
3. Literally the “*value of a peruta*,” a small coin in the Talmudic era.
4. Proverbs 1:19.
5. The simple meaning is that the robber is destroying his own life through his dastardly behavior. Here it is being interpreted to mean that the robber takes the life of the one he robs.
6. *Bava Metzia* 58b.

* Rabbi of Cong. Ahavas Yisrael of Pomona, N.Y.; also founder and Chief Executive of Tag International Development, a charitable organization that focuses on sharing Israeli expertise with developing countries.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5102978/jewish/The-Effects-of-Emotional-Trauma.htm

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim: Excitement vs. Indifference

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Excitement vs. Indifference

If any one of the Israelites or of the converts who dwell among them traps a wild animal or fowl that are permissible for consumption, when he sheds its blood, he must cover it with dust. (Lev. 17:13)

The Torah requires us to cover the blood that emerges from kosher fowl or kosher wild animals when they are slaughtered. This obligation does not apply to kosher domesticated mammals (cows, sheep, and goats).

All three types of kosher domesticated mammals can be offered up as sacrifices in the Temple. In contrast, only a minority of types of kosher birds (turtledoves and pigeons) and no types of kosher wild mammals (deer, ibex, etc.) may be offered up as sacrifices.

Blood signifies the energy and vitality that we invest in doing something. By telling us to cover up the blood of fowl and wild mammals but not to cover up the blood of domesticated mammals, the Torah is telling us that the energy and vitality that we invest in holy pursuits – as symbolized by the blood of the refined, domesticated animal – should be “uncovered,” i.e., openly expressed and articulated. In contrast, the energy and vitality that we invest in mundane pursuits – as signified by the blood of the wild, undomesticated animal – should be “covered,” i.e., muted and subdued. This ensures that our lives be properly focused and we maximize our spiritual potential.â

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 3

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Shabbat Shalom

Volume 32, Issue 27

Shabbat Parashat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

5786 B”H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l

Love Is Not Enough

The opening chapter of Kedoshim contains two of the most powerful of all commands: to love your neighbour and to love the stranger. “Love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord” goes the first. “When a stranger comes to live in your land, do not mistreat him,” goes the second, and continues, “Treat the stranger the way you treat your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt. I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:33-34).[1]

The first is often called the “golden rule” and held to be universal to all cultures. This is a mistake. The golden rule is different. In its positive formulation it states, “Act toward others as you would wish them to act toward you,” or in its negative formulation, given by Hillel, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour.” These rules are not about love. They are about justice, or more precisely, what evolutionary psychologists call reciprocal altruism. The Torah does not say, “Be nice or kind to your neighbour, because you would wish him to be nice or kind to you.” It says, “Love your neighbour.” That is something different and far stronger.

The second command is more radical still. Most people in most societies in most ages have feared, hated and often harmed the stranger. There is a word for this: xenophobia. How often have you heard the opposite word: xenophilia? My guess is, never. People don’t usually love strangers. That is why, almost always when the Torah states this command – which it does, according to the Sages, 36 times – it adds an explanation: “because you were strangers in Egypt.” I know of no other nation that was born as a nation in slavery and exile. We know what it feels like to be a vulnerable minority. That is why love of the stranger is so central to Judaism and so marginal to most other systems of ethics.[2] But here too, the Torah does not use the word “justice.” There is a command of justice toward strangers, but that is a different law: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him” (Ex. 22:20). Here the Torah speaks not of justice but of love.

These two commands define Judaism as a religion of love – not just of God (“with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might”), but of humanity also. That was and is a world-changing idea.

But what calls for deep reflection is where these commands appear. They do so in Parshat Kedoshim in what, to contemporary eyes, must seem one of the strangest passages in the Torah.

Leviticus 19 brings side-by-side laws of seemingly quite different kinds. Some belong to the moral life: don’t gossip, don’t hate, don’t take revenge, don’t bear a grudge. Some are about social justice: leave parts of the harvest for the poor; don’t pervert justice; don’t withhold wages; don’t use false weights and measures. Others have a different feel altogether: don’t crossbreed livestock; don’t plant a field with mixed seeds; don’t wear a garment of mixed wool and linen; don’t eat fruit of the first three years; don’t eat blood; don’t practice divination; don’t lacerate yourself.

At first glance these laws have nothing to do with one another: some are about conscience, some about politics and economics, and others about purity and taboo. Clearly, though, the Torah is telling us otherwise. They do have something in common. They are all about order, limits, boundaries. They are telling us that reality has a certain underlying structure whose integrity must be honoured. If you hate or take revenge you destroy relationships. If you commit injustice, you undermine the trust on which society depends. If you fail to respect the integrity of nature (different seeds, species, and so on), you take the first step down a path that ends in environmental disaster.

There is an order to the universe, part moral, part political, part ecological. When that order is violated, eventually there is chaos. When that order is observed and preserved, we become co-creators of the sacred harmony and integrated diversity that the Torah calls “holy.”

Why then is it specifically in this chapter that the two great commands – love of the neighbour and the stranger – appear? The answer is profound and very far from obvious. Because this is where love belongs – in an ordered universe.

Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist, has recently become one of the most prominent public intellectuals of our time. His book, *Twelve Rules for Life*, was a massive best-seller in Britain and America.[3] He has had the courage to be a contrarian, challenging the fashionable fallacies of the contemporary West. Particularly striking in the book is Rule 5: “Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them.”

His point is more subtle than it sounds. A significant number of parents today, he says, fail to socialise their children. They indulge them. They do not teach them rules. There are, he argues, complex reasons for this. Some of it has to do with lack of attention. Parents are busy and don’t have time for the demanding task of teaching discipline. Some of it has to do with Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s influential but misleading idea that children are naturally good, and are made bad by society and its rules. So the best way to raise happy, creative children is to let them choose for themselves.

Partly, though, he says it is because “modern parents are simply paralysed by the fear that they will no longer be liked, or even loved by their children if they chastise them for any reason.” They are afraid to damage their relationship by saying ‘No’. They fear the loss of their children’s love.

The result is that they leave their children dangerously unprepared for a world that will not indulge their wishes or desire for attention; a world that can be tough, demanding and sometimes cruel. Without rules, social skills, self-restraints and a capacity to defer gratification, children grow up without an apprenticeship in reality. His conclusion is powerful:

Clear rules make for secure children and calm, rational parents. Clear principles of discipline and punishment balance mercy and justice so that social development and

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psychological maturity can be optimally promoted. Clear rules and proper discipline help the child, and the family, and society, establish, maintain and expand order. That is all that protects us from chaos.[4]

That is what the opening chapter of Kedoshim is about: clear rules that create and sustain a social order. That is where real love – not the sentimental, self-deceiving substitute – belongs. Without order, love merely adds to the chaos. Misplaced love can lead to parental neglect, producing spoiled children with a sense of entitlement who are destined for an unhappy, unsuccessful, unfulfilled adult life.

Peterson's book, whose subtitle is "An Antidote to Chaos," is not just about children. It is about the mess the West has made since the Beatles sang (in 1967), "All You Need is Love". As a clinical psychologist, Peterson has seen the emotional cost of a society without a shared moral code. People, he writes, need ordering principles, without which there is chaos. We require "rules, standards, values – alone and together. We require routine and tradition. That's order." Too much order can be bad, but too little can be worse. Life is best lived, he says, on the dividing line between them. It's there, he says, that "we find the meaning that justifies life and its inevitable suffering." Perhaps if we lived properly, he adds, "we could withstand the knowledge of our own fragility and mortality, without the sense of aggrieved victimhood that produces, first, resentment, then envy, and then the desire for vengeance and destruction." [5]

That is as acute an explanation as I have ever heard for the unique structure of Leviticus 19. Its combination of moral, political, economic and environmental laws is a supreme statement of a universe of (Divinely created) order of which we are the custodians. But the chapter is not just about order. It is about humanising that order through love – the love of neighbour and stranger. And when the Torah says, don't hate, don't take revenge and don't bear a grudge, it is an uncanny anticipation of Peterson's remarks about resentment, envy and the desire for vengeance and destruction.

Hence the life-changing idea that we have forgotten for far too long: Love is not enough. Relationships need rules.

[1] Note that some read these two verses as referring specifically to a ger tzedek, that is, a convert to Judaism. That, however, is to miss the point of the command, which is: do not allow ethnic differences (that is, between a born Jew and a convert) to influence your emotions. Judaism must be race- and colour-blind.

[2] Had it existed in Europe, there would not have been a thousand years of persecution of the Jews, followed by the birth of racial antisemitism, followed by the Holocaust.

[3] Jordan Peterson, 12 Rules for Life: an antidote to chaos, Allen Lane, 2018.

[4] Ibid., 113-44.

[5] Ibid., xxxiv.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Leader Must Take Responsibility for His People

"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring a red heifer, faultless, wherein there is no blemish, and upon which there never came a yoke.... And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer must immerse his clothes; he remains ritually impure until evening." (Numbers 19:2-10)

One of the most profound mysteries of the Torah is the law of the red heifer, a ritual by which an individual who has become ritually defiled by contact with a corpse is purified by a kohen, who sprinkles him with a mixture of burnt ashes of a completely red heifer with water, into which must be thrust a piece of cedar wood, branches of hyssop, and a scarlet thread of wool (Numbers 19:1-6).

Not only are the various ingredients of this ritual difficult to fathom, appearing to be some kind of voodoo applied by Indian medicine men (God forbid!); perhaps the strangest aspect of all is the fact that while the impure person upon whom the ashes mixture is sprinkled emerges purified, those kohanim involved in the carrying, the burning, and the thrusting of the cedar wood all become defiled. How can the very same object be a purifying agent and a defiling instrument at one and the same time? It is no wonder that our Talmudic sages applied the words of King Solomon, wisest of all mortals, "I attempted to be wise, but it only moved further away from my understanding" (Ecclesiastes 7:23), to the mystery of the red heifer.

Moreover, why does the Torah record this particular ritual here, at the conclusion of the desert sojourn of the Israelites? Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explains that these laws were also given at Sinai, but were included in this context because the ritual must be prepared and performed by the kohanim, within the context of Korach-Chukkat which teaches about the gifts to be given to the kohanim by the Israelites once they enter Israel. But the rules of the kohanim belong much more to the books of Exodus (the portions of Teruma, Tetzaveh, Vayak'hel, and Pekudei) and Leviticus (the Holy Temple sacrificial cult) than to these stories of desert dissatisfaction, rebellion, and intrigue in the book of Numbers. Why is the ritual of the red heifer sandwiched between the sins of the scouts and of Korach in the two previous portions and the transgression of Moses in the segment immediately following?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik masterfully answers a significant part of our first query,

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insisting that the ritual of the red heifer can be understood rationally! To what may the ritual of the red heifer and the purifying kohanim be compared? To a hapless individual who finds himself drowning in quicksand. Certainly he must be rescued but the rescuer, who must lift the victim up from the quagmire, will of necessity become soiled in the process. Hence, those who prepare the mixture of purification are themselves defiled by it! Their very contact with those who have been defiled will perforce cause some defilement to transfer to them!

My revered teacher went one step further. Is it then fair, he asked, that those who attempt to purify become themselves impure in this process? Yes, he explained, once we understand that it is the religious leadership which has the responsibility of purifying society. Had the kohanim uplifted humanity to higher spiritual and ethical attainments, people would not have become contaminated by impurity in the first place. Hence it is only right that this same religious leadership assume the obligation of becoming defiled when so many Jews have been alienated from Torah and sanctity on its watch. The leaders must leave the ivory tower of the beit midrash (study hall) and reach out to the masses of Jews wherever and in whatever state they may be, even if it means that these very leaders will be removed from the environment of pure sanctity. As God tells Moses, spiritually ensconced in the ethereal realms of the heaven receiving the Oral Law, "Go down, descend from your supernal heights, because your nation is acting perversely with the Golden Calf; I only bestowed greatness upon you for the sake of the nation; if your nation is sinning what do I need you for?!" (Berakhot 32a). Leave this exalted Kollel, reach out to your errant congregants, and attempt to lift them up to a higher spiritual level. This is your responsibility, since every Jew, and especially a Jewish leader, is a co-signer for every other Jew and must take responsibility for their transgressions!

The timeless message of the kohanim, who come to purify with the ashes of the red heifer, is a powerful one to the leaders of every future generation: you must assume the risks of responsibility!

Even Moses had to suffer the fate of his generation since he did not prevent the Israelites from the transgression of listening to the scouts. Even the Jewish nation – also symbolized by the red heifer, as we have seen – must be taken out of the encampment to be slaughtered, albeit to be brought back to life by the ish tahir (personage of purity), for not teaching the world "compassionate righteousness and moral justice." Such is the heavy price – and fateful destiny – of leadership.

A Hasidic Postscript - The third day of Tammuz marks the anniversary of the passing of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. In my eyes as well as in the eyes of countless others – even many who, like myself, never became real Lubavitcher Hasidim – he was truly the leader of this past generation. From the time that I made the decision to become the rabbi of Lincoln Square Synagogue at age twenty-four until and including my aliya to Efrat and the establishment of the Ohr Torah Stone Institutions, I never made a significant move without seeking his sage advice. The one word which most characterizes his phenomenal style of leadership was his assumption of responsibility: he took responsibility for Jews all over the world, from Melbourne, Australia, to Johannesburg, South Africa, to Auckland, New Zealand, to Bangkok, Thailand, to Kiryat Malakhi, Israel. He inspired hundreds if not thousands of his disciples to become his emissaries in communities throughout the world, each one assuming a small share of the enormously heavy burden carried with such grace and faith by their revered Rebbe.

The Rebbe provided a magnificent addendum to the interpretation Rabbi Soloveitchik gave to the ritual of the Red Heifer. Yes, those who prepare the mixture of purification – the one who burns the heifer to make the ashes; the one who thrusts into the mixture the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet thread; the one who gathers the various ingredients together; and the one who carries them – all of these become defiled in their pursuit of purifying those who are impure. However, the one who actually sprinkles the mixture upon the individual defiled and thereby effectuates the actual purification remains pure (Numbers 19:21, Rashi ad loc.). Hence the Rebbe made a promise to each of his shlichim (emissaries) all over the world – to those individuals who did the actual purifying themselves, the junior partners of the Rebbe who took responsibility to perform God's work of purification: these actual purifiers were guaranteed, they and their families, to remain pure, no matter how isolated they may be. It is through these emissaries that the Rebbe's legacy lives on.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Sinners Cause Cosmic Consequences

It is no secret that many liberals and progressives are permissive regarding biblical proscriptions. This is especially true in the case of the recent weekly Torah portions in which a wide variety of intimate relationships are forbidden but are viewed in many sectors of modern society as archaic and no longer relevant.

This week, we combine two weekly readings, Acharei Mot and Kedoshim (Leviticus 16:1-

20:27). Toward the very end of this dual and, therefore, quite lengthy parsha, we encounter a forbidden behavior which even the most lenient progressive ethicist would not permit. Indeed, he would find it unforgiveable and even heinous.

I am referring to the primitive mode of worship which involved sacrificing one's children to the pagan deity known as Molekh. I am quite certain that even in current permissive times, there is a universal consensus that casting one's own children upon the fiery altars of some reprehensible, and incomprehensible, "god" would be condemned as abhorrent, evil, and intolerable.

Let us examine the text of the passage describing the prohibition against "worshipping" Molekh and the punishment for doing so. I will italicize selected phrases which have special import. The entire text appears in Leviticus 20:1-5:

The Lord spoke to Moshe: "Tell the Israelites: Any person—any one among the Israelites—or among the strangers residing in Israel—who sacrifices any of his children to Molekh shall be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him, and I Myself will set My face against that person; I will sever him from his people because, in sacrificing his children to Molekh, he defiles My Mikdash; he desecrates My holy name. If the people of the land should shut their eyes to that man as he sacrifices his children to Molekh—if they do not put him to death ... I will sever him from his people..."

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, Ramban, has much to say about this entire passage. For one thing, he quotes his famous predecessor, Rashi, in translating the word Mikdash in the text above. That word is often translated as "sanctuary," implying that the Molekh worshipper has somehow defiled the Mishkan, Tabernacle, or perhaps the Beit HaMikdash, Holy Temple.

But does an idolatrous act practiced elsewhere defile the Sanctuary? Definitely not!

Therefore, both Rashi and Ramban insist that in this case, Mikdash refers to the Almighty's holy people, Knesset Yisrael, the Community of Israel. Of all the titles that are applied to the Jewish people, I firmly believe that Knesset Yisrael is the most inclusive of all.

Ramban notes that the Molekh worshipper defiles not just himself and those who emulate his horrendous mode of worship but somehow defiles us all! This, continues Ramban, is also stressed in our text which repetitively refers to "the people of the land," asserting that in some manner, all the people of the land, the am Haaretz, are affected by one person's sin and

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must act in unison to rid themselves of the Molekh worshipper.

Ramban takes this as an indication of the power of the individual to corrupt others, whether those others are close friends or family of the idolator or are total strangers dwelling in far-flung corners of the planet, thousands of miles away.

Ramban extends his message of the power of one individual to affect others to claim that he can even affect the cosmos itself. The sinner causes cosmic consequences.

To broaden his case, Ramban reminds us of another "prohibition," much less severe than casting one's offspring into the furnaces of Molekh, but one which is much more commonly violated. He alludes to a passage in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot 35b. It reads in part: He who derives pleasure from this world and does not recite the appropriate blessing beforehand has "stolen" from the Holy One Blessed Be He and from Knesset Yisrael," the "Community of Israel" ... He is a "colleague" of the evil king Jeroboam ben Nevat, who sinned and caused many others to sin as well.

Ramban offers this passage as a parallel to our Molekh worshipper. He acted alone, and his dastardly act affected the entire world community of Israel. So too did the person who neglectfully failed to recite the blessing "... borei pri ha'adama" impact all of Israel.

How can one equate overlooking a beracha with sacrificing his own offspring?

In response, Ramban eloquently explains, and I paraphrase: The Almighty's purpose in Creation was to have mankind express blessing to His great name and thereby contribute to the maintenance of the Universe. And if we fail to do so, the Shechina, God's presence, will abandon us. If this is true of one who neglects to recite a beracha, a relatively minor infraction, then it is certainly true of one who sacrifices his "fruit" to Molekh. Such a vile individual blasphemes the "pride of Jacob" and His dwelling place."

Ramban, as he often does, concludes this powerful teaching with reference to Kabbalistic sources which convey this message: Individuals influence others, even the entire human race, and in some mystical sense even the cosmos itself.

Many will find these exceptional teachings difficult to accept. But they reflect a basic teaching: "One should say to himself: the world was created for me," (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 37a) Is that a prescription for grandiosity and arrogance? The answer is,

“No!” Rather, it is advice that we all must take to heart.

Each of us as individuals, no matter our status, no matter our material means or our intellectual capacities, has the ability to influence others. We can do so intentionally, by serving as models of proper behavior for others to emulate. Or we can act neglectfully, or knowingly, in ways which are, if not reprehensible like the Molekh worshipper, are missed opportunities to inspire other people to recognize the Master of the Universe, His omnipotence and omniscience, and His charge to all of us to “turn away from evil and do good.”

The sinner may cause cosmic consequences, yes. But each one of us, as individuals, can cause compassion and kindness, helpfulness and sensitivity, unity and friendship, and a world at peace.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand
An Enabler or Facilitator Gets Credit As if He Was the Doer

The pasuk in the beginning of Parshas Acharei Mos says, “From the assembly of the Children of Israel he shall take two he-goats for a sin-offering and one ram for a burnt-offering.” (Vayikra 16:5) The Kohen Gadol brought korbanos for himself, for the Kohanim and for all of Klal Yisrael. The two goats that the pasuk mentioned include one that was offered on the mizbayach (altar) and one that was sent to be thrown off the Azazel cliff.

I saw an interesting observation in the sefer Shemen HaTov. I was amazed that I never thought of this question myself: Why does the Torah say that two goats are taken for a chatas (sin-offering), when, in fact, only one of them is offered as a chatas? A chatas has very specific halachos. It needs to be shechted by a Kohen and it needs to be shechted in a very specific place. The second goat, the sair l’Azazel, even though it is called a “chatas,” was not really a “chatas.” It is not brought on the mizbayach, it is not shechted and the blood is not sprinkled. It is thrown down a mountainous cliff. It has few if any of the halachos of a chatas, and yet the Torah says “take two he-goats for a chatas”. Why is the sair l’Azazel called a Korban Chatas?

The Shemen HaTov suggests the following: The Gemara says that these two goats need to be identical – matching in value, in voice, and in appearance. Basically, they need to be twins. The Kohen Gadol drew lots between the two with the result being that one would go to Hashem and one would go to Azazel. This procedure of drawing lots to determine the fate of each was essential.

If both goats are not present, the one to be offered on the mizbayach cannot become a Korban Chatas either. The only way one of them becomes a Korban Chatas is by having the other one present and going through the lottery process so that the true Korban Chatas can be identified and designated. Since the sair l’Azazel causes, enables and facilitates the other goat becoming a Korban Chatas, it too is called a Korban Chatas.

When you are essential for something else happening then you receive the same status as that other thing. We can readily see the hashkafik implications of this in so many areas of life. If I enable someone else to sit and learn Torah, then it is as if I am sitting and learning Torah. This is not news to us: “...Rejoice Zevulun in your excursions, and Yissocher in your tents.” (Devarim 33:18). Chazal say that the Torah not only gave equal billing but actually gave primary billing to Zevulun because he enabled Yissocher to be able to sit and learn. The facilitator of something has the same halacha as the person who actually does it. So the sair l’Azazel, without whom you could not have a sair l’Hashem – that sair l’Azazel also has the status of a Korban Chatas.

Based on this idea, the Shemen HaTov answers a question. (Later on in our second piece, we will give a different answer to this question.) The Shemen HaTov’s answer may not be “p’shat” but it certainly has a homiletical message which should resonate with us.

The Gemara says that according to Rabbi Akiva, the pasuk “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Vayikra 19:18) is the “Klal gadol baTorah” (the “great rule” of Torah law). This was Rabbi Akiva’s mantra. However, there is another statement of Rabbi Akiva in Shas that appears to contradict this rule. The famous Gemara (Bava Metzia 62a) is about the case of two people walking in the desert with only one jug of water between them. If they share the jug, there will not be enough water for either, and they will both die. If the one holding onto the water drinks it all, he will live and the second person will die. What should be done? Ben Petura opines that they should share the jug even though neither person will then remain alive. Rabbi Akiva, who elsewhere famously says “Love your neighbor as yourself” says over here “Your life takes precedence” (i.e. – whoever is holding onto the water should drink it all himself).

We might ask, what happened to Rabbi Akiva’s mantra of “Love your neighbor like yourself?” Why did he now rule that a person should drink all the water himself, even though his companion will thereby die of thirst? On the surface, these appear to be diametrically opposed positions.

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To answer this question, the Shemen HaTov cites a beautiful observation from the Chidushei Harim: There is no contradiction because one dictum applies to ruchniyus (spiritual matters) and the other dictum applies to gashmiyus (physical matters). By gashmiyus, a person’s own life takes precedence. My life takes precedence over yours and I have every right to drink those last drops of water myself. However, by ruchniyus “Love your neighbor like yourself” – we are both the same. The Shemen HaTov explains that by ruchniyus, when I enable you to sit and learn, it is like I am also learning. When I offer someone else the opportunity to achieve spiritual accomplishment, I will not lose as a result because someone who enables someone else to fulfill a mitzvah receives the same reward and status as someone who did the mitzvah.

The Shemen HaTov infers this distinction by taking careful note of Rabbi Akiva’s exact words: “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself – ‘this is the great rule baTorah (by Torah)”. By learning Torah or by other matters of ruchniyus, the rule is ‘Love your neighbor like yourself.’ This is because in ruchniyus, the facilitator or enabler gets credit as if he himself did it. The sair l’Azazel has a status of a Korban Chatas because it is a facilitator: Without it, the real chatas could not be offered!

The Ramban’s Definition of Loving One’s Neighbor Like Himself

The resolution of the apparent contradiction between the two statements of Rabbi Akiva shared above is al pi derush (homiletic). However, at least according to the Ramban, there is a more straightforward answer. In Parshas Kedoshim, there is a very important Ramban on the pasuk “And you shall love your neighbor like yourself. I am Hashem.” (Vayikra 19:18). The Ramban says something than only a rishon could say: “This statement of the Torah that someone should love his neighbor as himself is somewhat of an exaggeration!” It does not mean that I literally need to love you as I love myself. The Ramban says that such a mitzvah is not realistic. It is not possible for a person to love his fellow man as much as he loves himself. Perhaps I can aspire to love my wife as much as myself, perhaps my children, but not just any other Jew.

Furthermore, the Ramban cites Rabbi Akiva’s dispute with Ben Petura (cited above; Bava Metzia 62a) where he insists “Your life comes before the life of your friend.” What then does “V’ahavta l’rayacha kamocho” mean? The Ramban defines the mitzvah as follows: I should want good for you just as much as I want good for myself! Just like I want to make

a good living, so too I want you to make a good living. Just as I want nachas from my children, so too, I want you to have nachas from your children.

The Ramban continues: There are people who say “Okay, you can be as rich as me, but you can’t be as smart as me.” Even if a person says “I want you to be as rich as me and as smart as me, and I want for you all those things that I want for myself – but I still want to be a little smarter, richer, etc.,” that attitude is precluded by the mitzvah of “V’ahavta l’rayacha kamocha” because it is a function of kinah (jealousy). The Torah is telling us to get rid of that midah (attribute) of kinah.

I will mention as an aside that I recently heard on the radio (NPR) of a very interesting study that was done at the Kolar School of Management in Tel Aviv University. The conclusion of this study was the following: “We find that Facebook usage increases users’ engagement in social comparison and consequently decreases their happiness.” On Facebook, everyone is noticing how great the next person has it, and they become jealous. Ironically, this social media where everyone shares what they are doing with everyone else creates the impression that everyone is having a great time, except me. This is because people don’t put on Facebook the times that they are in terrible moods or have tzores, etc., etc. Life appears to be all fun and games.

There was an example of a woman who spoke on the radio and she said that she lives in the Blueridge Mountains so she posted a picture of her house with the majestic Blueridge Mountains in the background. People think, “Beautiful, Look at that! I live across from an apartment building!” However, she admitted that the picture did not show the fact that she lives right next to a factory in the Blueridge Mountains. What she did post causes kinah.

Another woman said that she was invited to a wedding. Exactly that same day, her friends were making a beach party. She decided to go to the wedding, but during the entire wedding she kept looking on Facebook to see what was going on at the beach party so she couldn’t enjoy the wedding. That is the midah of kinah.

That is what this mitzvah is about – that you should want for your friend exactly what you want for yourself. The Ramban continues that the classic example in Tanach of appropriate fulfillment of the mitzvah of V’ahavta l’rayacha kamocha is the love of Yonosan to Dovid. Yonosan totally removed the midah of kinah from his personality and told Dovid “You will be King of Israel.” Yonosan son of Shaul, who was the heir to the throne, wanted his friend Dovid to become king. This is the gold standard, says the Ramban, of loving your

neighbor as yourself. “I want you to have it just as good as me, and it does not matter whether you will be the king or I will be the king.”

In this connection, I would like to share what I think is a fantastic Targum Yonoson ben Uziel. Yonoson ben Shaul was killed and Dovid, his yedid-nefesh (soul-buddy) eulogized him. “I am distressed over you, my brother, Yonoson, you were so pleasant to me! Your love was more wondrous to me than the love of women!” (Shmuel II 1:26) The Metzudas there interprets the final phrase of this pasuk to mean that Dovid’s love for Yonoson was as strong and powerful as the desire men have for women whom they strongly desire. This is in fact the p’shuto shel mikra (the straightforward intent of Scripture).

But listen to how the Targum Yonoson ben Uziel interprets this phrase: “Your love to me is greater than the love of two women.” What does the Targum mean? The way the term “ahavas nashim” is translated literally is, as the Metzudas says, “the love of women.” What is the meaning of Targum Yonoson’s translation: “the love of two women”?

Someone quoted a vorte from the Bobover Rebbe: Apparently, the Targum Yonoson had something specific in mind when he said “two women.” He was speaking about two specific women – namely Rochel and Leah. Rochel was willing to give the ‘simanim’ to her sister, Leah, so that Leah could marry Yaakov, leaving Rochel potentially stuck with marrying Eisav. These “two women” had a love that was so great that Rochel wanted for her sister the very thing that she wanted for herself. Just like Yonoson was willing to tell Dovid, “You will be king over Israel and I won’t,” so too Rochel was willing to tell Leah “You will marry Yaakov and I won’t”. Those are the “two women” to which the Targum is referring.

This, says the Ramban, is what the mitzvah of “V’ahavta l’rayacha kamocha” is all about. It is not so easy to accomplish.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Where does the Torah tell us that there is an afterlife? There are actually quite a number of references to this, and one of them is in Parshat Acharei Mot.

Here, the Torah tells us: Asher ya’aseh otam ha’adam vachai bahem—we should perform the Mitzvot of Hashem so that we live through them. There are different Perushim (commentaries) on this term vachai bahem. What does it really mean?

The Talmud, in Masechet Yoma (Daf peh heh, amud aleph), brings the view of our sages which states: Asher ya’aseh otam ha’adam vachai bahem, velo yamut bahem—the

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Mitzvot are here to live through them, and not to die through them, God forbid.

The performance of Mitzvot should not force you to forfeit your life. This applies to all situations—except for just three: the three cardinal sins, which are murder, idolatry, and adultery.

That is why Pikuach Nefesh—the saving of life—transcends all. For example, if on Shabbat, one needs to go to hospital or take somebody to hospital in order to save a life, of course you must break Shabbat for that purpose. And so too on Yom Kippur: if a doctor orders one to eat in order to preserve life – of course you must break your fast.

There is also a fascinating perush—a commentary—of the Chiddushei Harim. He says vachai bahem, “live through them,” means: get a life through them. Through the performance of Mitzvot, our lives are enhanced. We have added meaning and joy in our existence here on Earth.

The third perush I want to bring to your attention is that of Targum Onkelos—the Aramaic translation of the Torah.

The Targum tells us: vachai bahem means that you should live through them both in this world and in the world to come.

As a result of leading an upright life filled with Mitzvot, we pave the way towards continued existence. When, sadly, a person passes away, it’s only the physical form that is ended. The neshama—the soul—continues to live on.

So therefore, from the Torah we learn that by performing the Mitzvot, by being outstanding human beings, we are guaranteed a life of meaning and of joy—an enhanced existence in this world. But even more than that, we are guaranteed the ongoing life of the soul.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Drawing Water from a Rock

Rabbi Yaron Adorian

Every Person is a Diamond - Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach z”l once came to Manhattan to deliver a lecture at the New York Diamond Dealers Club. During the talk, one of the participants asked him why he devoted so much of his time to helping those on the margins of society. Rabbi Shlomo replied with a question of his own:

“I’ve heard that you folks know a thing or two about diamonds, right? So tell me — is it possible that you’d walk past an especially valuable diamond, hidden beneath many layers, and fail to notice it?”

They answered with confidence: “Impossible! We’re the best in the world when it comes to diamonds!”

Rabbi Shlomo said: “Well, I know diamonds too — diamonds of infinite worth. Every person is a diamond. And when I see such a diamond, even if it’s buried beneath many rough layers, I recognize it — and I would never miss its immeasurable value.”

Human beings are complex. Within each person lies a pure diamond, though it may at times be encased in a hard shell of stone. The question that troubles us all is how to uncover the radiant soul hidden beneath the coarse material exterior. A possible answer may lie in one of the Torah’s central narratives, found in our parsha — Moshe Rabbeinu’s transgression at the waters of Merivah.

The Sin and Its Consequence - The story opens with a clear emphasis: a new generation now stands before us. “And the entire congregation arrived” — Rashi explains, “A complete congregation, for the generation of the wilderness had passed away.” The Torah takes us forward in time, to the beginning of the fortieth year in the desert, where we now meet a generation born into freedom — one destined to enter the Land of Israel.

But no sooner had the final stretch of their journey begun than they face their first test. Miriam passes away, and with her, the miraculous well disappears. Once again, there is no water for the community. The people complain. Moshe and Aharon fall on their faces, and God instructs Moshe on how to satisfy their thirst:

“Take the staff and assemble the congregation... and speak to the rock before their eyes, and it shall yield its water.”

Moshe carries out the first part of the command precisely, taking the staff. But in the second part, he deviates: instead of speaking, he strikes the rock twice. The punishment is swift — Moshe and Aharon are handed a severe decree that shatters their most cherished dream: “Therefore, you shall not bring this congregation into the land...”

This story raises several pointed questions. How could Moshe, the faithful shepherd, diverge from the Divine command? On the other hand, does it truly matter whether the water came through speech or striking? After all, drawing water from a rock is a profound miracle either way. And why punish them by denying entry into the Land — the very pinnacle of their aspirations?

The difficulty intensifies when we recall that striking the rock had previously been

acceptable in God’s eyes. Moshe already had experience drawing water this way — thirty-nine years earlier, at the rock in Chorev, when he had been explicitly commanded by God to strike it. What had changed this time?

Spot the Differences - A close look at the story of the striking of the rock at Chorev, in Parshat Beshalach, reveals several intriguing differences.

In our parsha, Moshe is first instructed to gather the congregation, to draw water “before their eyes,” and to give them to drink. The people are given a meaningful role — they are to be active participants in the miracle.

In the Book of Shemot, by contrast, the people remain in the background. Moshe is not told to gather them, but rather to “pass before them,” and the miracle is to take place only “in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

Furthermore, while in Shemot Moshe acts alone, here he is explicitly commanded to include Aharon and to assemble the people together with him.

Another fascinating difference lies in the description of the rock itself. In Beshalach, the verse states, “and water shall come out of it,” whereas in our story, it reads, “and it shall yield its water.” Two changes are evident: the water does not burst forth under force, but rather the rock gives of its own accord — and not just any water, but its own water.

Two Modes of Leadership - Midrash Yalkut Shimoni offers a powerful interpretation of these differences: “When a boy is young, his teacher strikes him and teaches him; once he grows up, he is corrected with words. So said the Holy One to Moshe: When this rock was ‘young,’ you struck it, as it says, ‘and you shall strike the rock.’ But now: ‘Speak to the rock’ — review a chapter of Torah before it, and it will yield water.”

This story turns out to be a profound lesson — one that Moshe, and all of us, are meant to internalize.

There are two ways to break through the hard outer shell and reveal the living waters hidden beneath the surface. These two approaches lie before every educator.

The first is to strike the rock — to attempt to force reality through external pressure. In the world of education, any approach that relies on punishment or threat is, in essence, a form of coercion aimed at producing the desired behavior. Establishing firm boundaries, backed by the possibility of enforcement, breaks down the student’s negative will and forces the water to flow. Even when lofty truths are imposed

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from above without walking the child through a gradual process — this too is a form of striking the rock.

The second approach is speech — not a blow that compels the water to come forth, but a word that moves the rock to give of its own accord. Through gentle speech and pleasant explanation, the student is persuaded to walk the right path. After an inner journey, he arrives at a clear understanding of what is good — and comes to desire it on his own. He does not behave properly because he “must,” but because he truly understands, identifies with, and wishes to live by that good.

The first method may be easier and more immediately effective: strike hard enough, and water comes out. But in that approach, it is not the rock that gives the water — and certainly not its own water. The blow compels submission, robbing the rock of its natural integrity. The second method, though slower and more demanding, ultimately leads the rock to want to give — to offer its waters authentically, from its pure depths.

Stages of Growth - The Midrash points out that this distinction reflects developmental stages. When the student is still a child, we may need to rely on the method of striking. His nature is unrefined, his intellect not yet fully developed, and at times, only a strong response can break through his negative tendencies. Often, the child is locked into his own worldview, and there is no choice but to compel him to bend his misguided desires.

But as the young person matures, the rules change. His intellect deepens, his self-awareness expands, and he seeks to do good out of understanding and clarity. He is no longer content to act simply “because that’s how it has to be.” At this stage, striking may not only fail — it may cause harm. Only through speech can we guide the adolescent to a place where he offers his own water — where he freely chooses what is right.

Just as these principles hold true for the individual, so too do they apply to the nation. The first approach was essential during the early stages of the development of the people of Israel. They had only just emerged from Egypt, after 210 years of slavery and cultural assimilation. Immersed in the forty-ninth gate of impurity, there was no choice but to deliver the overwhelming Divine truth from above.

But after forty years of wandering in the desert, the generation had transformed. The people had reached a level of maturity — a readiness that demanded a new mode of leadership: not striking, but speaking. They now had to choose the upright path through their own recognition and inner alignment.

Therefore, in our parsha, Moshe is instructed to gather the congregation and involve them in the miracle. The event must unfold with their full presence and participation.

From the Miraculous Dimension to the Natural One - The transition from the generation of the Exodus to the generation poised to enter the Land of Israel marks a true revolution. One of the clearest expressions of this change is the shift in Divine governance — from the miraculous to the natural.

The verse in Parshat Beshalach emphasizes that the staff Moshe took was the very one with which the signs and wonders were performed. The essence of miracles is to break the bounds of nature and compel it to conform to the will of God.

But the miracles that accompanied the people during the Exodus and throughout their journey in the desert were now to fade gradually as they prepared to enter the Land of Israel. No longer would there be bread from heaven — but bread from the earth. No longer would “the Lord fight for you and you shall remain silent”; rather, warfare would now unfold through natural means. The reality itself was to be elevated. Human nature, with all its strengths and virtues, was to be revealed in full — and to become a source of blessing.

In our story, God commands Moshe to take the staff — but not to use it. This was meant to highlight that from this point onward, the staff was to recede from the stage, and with it, the entire mode of miraculous leadership. The approach of imposing Divine truth from above would now give way to a gradual process of inner growth from below.

Moshe himself, in his exalted spiritual stature, belonged to the realm of the staff. But here, he was called upon to shift — from miraculous intervention to natural guidance. To help bridge that transition, he was to bring Aharon with him — the speaker, the one who had served as his mouthpiece ever since their mission to Pharaoh in Egypt.

But Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it. And so it became clear: his elevated persona no longer aligned with the generation about to enter the Land. His punishment was not merely a consequence — it revealed a deeper incompatibility. The transition to natural leadership would have to be entrusted to his disciple.

The Generation of Our Own Entry into the Land - In our time, as the people of Israel have returned to Zion after thousands of years in exile, a new generation has arisen — a generation of those who have entered the Land, yet who will not yield their water

through being struck. They reject coercion. They refuse to connect to Torah out of fear of punishment. They do not wish to observe mitzvot simply because they “must” or are “obligated to.”

HaRav Kook zt”l taught us that the time has come to move from striking to speaking. Only through gentleness — through dialogue that flows from heart to heart — can we pierce the layers of stone. Then the rock will want to give forth its water — the unique waters of Torah meant for this generation — out of genuine desire and deep identification.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Our Role in Endowing Kedusha

Kedusha permeates many aspects of Avodas Hashem. There are four aspects of kedusha which, although different from one another, have unifying themes in common. There is kedushas makom, the sanctity of a geographic location such as the Beis Hamikdash and Eretz Yisrael; kedushas zman, the endowing of time with holiness, which includes Shabbos and yom tov; the words of Torah are holy and therefore sifrei Torah, tefillin and mezuzos are treated as sacred objects; and performance of mitzvot are an expression of kedusha that is incorporated into the text that is recited prior to mitzvah observance, "אשר קידשנו במצותיו".

For one to create a halachic status, it is often necessary that the particular area of halacha be relevant to the one attempting to do so. For example, one who is not obligated or does not wear tefillin is disqualified from writing the parshiyot for tefillin. Similarly, a non-Jew cannot be a shochet or a mohel because these mitzvot are not relevant to them. Following this model, only one who is endowed with kedusha could impart kedusha to other entities. Parshas Kedoshim begins with the identification of two sources of kedusha. The ultimate source of all kedusha is Hashem, Who is described as "כי קדוש אני ה' אלוהיכם". The Jewish people are commanded to emulate the characteristic of kedushas Hashem and are instructed to attain the level of "קדושים תהיו". Only Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His holy nation can, in turn, endow kedusha on others. Within the four dimensions of kedusha, Hashem and Klal Yisrael endow this sanctity.

There are two parts of kedushas makom, the kedusha of the Beis Hamikdash and of Eretz Yisrael. Halachically, these kedushas are each endowed differently. The Rambam explains this distinction between them as emanating from different sources. Hashem's Presence sanctifies the Beis Hamikdash, whereas Eretz Yisrael receives its holiness from the conquest and settlement of the land by the Jewish People. It is this distinction that results in a difference whether the kedusha can ever be

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removed. Concerning Eretz Yisrael, the laws that relate to agriculture depend on the status the Jewish People have in the land. At times the mitzvot of teruma, ma'aser and shemita may not be applicable d'oraysa if the vehicle that creates kedushas Eretz Yisrael, which is Klal Yisrael, is not present. Kedushas Beis Hamikdash, which results from Hashem, can never be suspended. The Rambam observes that "שכינה אינה בטלה" - the Divine Presence that sanctified the Beis Hamikdash can never be removed.

Similarly, in the realm of kedushas zman there is a fundamental difference between Shabbos and yom tov. Hashem sanctifies Shabbos and therefore Shabbos existed before the birth of the Jewish People. Yom tov cannot exist without Klal Yisrael as it is the Jewish People that sanctifies Rosh Chodesh, thereby bringing about kedushas yom tov. Chazal highlight this difference in how they formulated the text of the tefillah and kiddush. On Shabbos we refer to Hashem as the One who is "מקדש שבת", and only on yom tov do we refer to Klal Yisrael as the prerequisite to kedushas yom tov by saying "מקדש ישראל והזמנים".

Within the world of Torah knowledge there are two aspects of kedusha. The תורה שבכתב and the parts of the תורה שבעל פה that were transmitted directly to Moshe on Har Sinai which were endowed with kedushas haTorah by Hashem. The Torah was given to Klal Yisrael to analyze and interpret properly. The portion of תורה שבעל פה that emanates from Chazal using the rules transmitted to משה רבינו as to how to correctly understand תורה attains its kedushas haTorah from kedushas Klal Yisrael. In the realm of mitzvah observance there are mitzvot from the Torah itself and others that were instituted by Chazal. We recite the identical beracha, "אשר קידשנו במצותיו", when we perform mitzvot such as matzo and shofar that were given directly by Hashem and when we light Chanuka candles and read the Megillah which were instituted by Chazal.

Kedusha bestowed by Hashem and by Klal Yisrael are related to one another. In the realm of kedushas makom this is apparent in the way Eretz Yisrael is sanctified. The method of conquest is accompanied by representation of the Beis Hamikdash. The special Kohen Gadol that goes out to accompany those sanctifying the land and the Aron that joins the battle highlight that the kedusha of Eretz Yisrael is an outgrowth of kedushas Hamikdash. Similarly, the yomim tovim are dependent upon Shabbos, as Shabbos is described as the "תחילה למקראי קדש" - the first of the holy days." Concerning Torah and mitzvot, halachos instituted by Chazal are modeled after direct word of Hashem - "כל דתקון רבנן כעין דאורייתא" - "תיקון". The halachic guidelines that govern

מצוות דאורייתא are parallel to מצוות דרבנן. The goal of דינין דרבנן is to preserve and enhance our observance of דינין דאורייתא.

Our privilege to endow place and time with sanctity and to incorporate תורה into דינין דרבנן is contingent on our knowledge as to the source of our kedusha. "קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני" - by imitating Hashem and living up to the standards of kedusha incumbent upon us, we are granted the opportunity to partner with Hashem in bringing kedusha to the world.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

What the Whole Day is About

For on this day, He shall affect atonement for you, to cleanse you. Before HASHEM, you shall be cleansed from all your sins. (Vayikra 16:30)

It was more than 30 something years ago and I was beginning a new chapter in life going out into the big city of New York to learn Torah with business people, millionaires and billionaires, men of industry. One thing began to concern me as I started. I knew there was a difference, back then, between having a TV or not having a TV. That was the challenge of that time. (Remember those days!?) I was one who had chosen to keep my focus away from worldly matters. However, I soon discovered that my trips to New York, the Big Apple were having an effect on my basic level of Kedusha. I was mentally and physically and emotionally exhausted from the traveling and having to refocus my attention at all times. I felt like I was living in the TV. It didn't matter whether I was the one who had or didn't have. The environment itself was toxic for me.

So, I came to ask Rabbi Ezriel Tauber ztl. what I should do. He didn't hesitate. He understood my dilemma right away. He too had worked there for many years. He insisted that I go to the Mikva every day. That meant getting up even earlier every day before catching the bus to the city. He told me that the Rambam waxes poetic and calls the Mikva "Mei Daas" – "waters of knowledge". It had wondrous powers. If it can take a gentile and make him into a Jew, with the proper intent, then what can it do for a Jew!?

I started going regularly. It made a world of difference. I can't describe it. I felt like a hot knife slicing through butter as I went about my business in the big city milieu. The one or two times that I missed I detected the obvious difference. It was like the difference between night and day. Every day I would go and refocus and rededicate my energies to a new day. I can't see myself living any other way now.

That year went around and Yom Kippur arrived. On Yom Kippur, one of the five things that we don't do, besides not eating and drinking, is not bathing and not washing. On Yom Kippur immersion the Mikva is forbidden. Yom Kippur was going as Yom Kippur tends to go. I still don't know why they call it a "fast" day. It should be called a "slow" day. Anyway, we were nearing the end of a long and intense Yeshiva Davening. There was more one more leg to go. After Mincha and before Neila we took just a 20-minute break to prepare for the last push of Teshuva.

I approached Rabbi Tauber as he was resting in preparation for leading that last service. I told him that I miss the Mikva terribly on Yom Kippur. I thought I would get a nod of agreement or approval. After all, it was his great advice that was working so well for me. Instead, he gave me a look that shouts. He said, "You think you need the Mikva today? Then you don't know what the whole day is about!" I was shocked. Here, the whole day had almost passed and there was only a half hour yet to go and I don't know what the whole day is about. He explained, "You are in the Mikva on Yom Kippur". You are Tovelung (soaking and bathing) in Yud and Hey and Vuv and Hey, in the name of HASHEM."

The dirt is being removed by the most powerful and universal solvent, Teshuva, and HASHEM, Himself is washing us in his Mikva as the last Mishne is Yoma declares in the name of Rabbi Akiva; Rabbi Akiva said: 'How fortunate are you, Israel; before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? It is your Father in Heaven, as it is stated: "And I will sprinkle purifying water upon you, and you shall be purified" (Yechezkel 36:25). And it says: "The Mikva of Israel is HASHEM" (Yermiahu 17:13). Just as a Mikva purifies the impure, so too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, purifies Israel.'

Now, I am grateful to know and to share with you what the whole day is about!

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's

Derashot Ledorot

Normal is Not Average

The Torah's moral code is the accepted cornerstone of Western civilization.

Unfortunately, however, despite its widespread acceptance in theory, statistics in recent years indicate that it is honored more in the breach than in the observance. Moral laxity and marital infidelity have become part of a matter-of-fact way of life not only amongst the idols of the amusement world, but for an ever larger number of ordinary people. The most corrosive aspect of this situation is not what it does to those who do not care, but what it has done to the morale of those who are truly moral. Since they are in the minority, or a gradually diminishing majority, they tend to think that perhaps they are wrong.

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They are afflicted with self-doubt: perhaps unchastity is normal, and those who abstain are not normal. Maybe, as some statisticians have suggested, our whole moral code needs revamping. Since much of what has been previously condemned as immoral and degenerate is now widely practiced, perhaps they should no longer be regarded as wrong and reprehensible.

It is against this devious kind of reasoning that the Torah, centuries ago, proclaimed in clear words, in its introduction to its moral code, the doctrine: "Like the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein you dwelt, shall you not do; like the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I am bringing you, shall you not do; neither shall you walk in their statutes" (Lev. 18:3). What the Torah is saying is that what is being done -- whether in Egypt or Canaan -- is no guide for what should be done -- whether in those places or London or New York or Tel Aviv or anywhere else.

The "is" should not limit and determine the "ought." A distinguished American man of letters, Joseph Wood Krutch, has brilliantly analyzed our contemporary dilemma as a semantic obfuscation of two concepts which are most pertinent to our discussion. They are, "average" and "normal."

A new phenomenon in our modern age -- with its democratization, its penchant for measuring and statistics, and its mass culture -- is the tendency to identify the normal with the average, to believe that what most people do must be right. The sophisticated call this "relativism." The ordinary man knows it by experience as "being normal." To do as most people do -- that is normal. To do otherwise - that is abnormal, or subnormal, as the case may be. When a young mother says, "I want my child to be normal," she usually -- though not always -- means that she does not want him to stand out by being too bookish or too intellectual -- or too frum. She means "average," though she says "normal."

This confounding of the normal and the average is one of the most fundamental and disastrous errors that anyone can make. In order to remain civilized and prevent our whole society as well as our personal lives from deteriorating to the lowest common denominator, we must appreciate the tremendous abyss that separates the average from the normal. The average is only a description of the facts; the normal is the ideal, the principle, what ought to be. It is only in a perfect world that the average is normal. In real life, the average is usually far below the normal. In fact, to be completely normal is very rare indeed.

From this it follows that it is the normal, not the average, which is desirable and for which we should strive. Otherwise, life becomes meaningless, even ludicrous. For instance, in the population at large there are some people who have only one leg, and some who have none.

Thus the average man or woman has about 1.9 legs. Nevertheless, the normal person still has two legs. If we were to accept the popular error, and say that what is average is normal, and that this is desirable, then anyone who has two legs ought to be required to cut off an inch of one of them!

If the average is declared the normal, then all genius and excellence must be banished. All art must be reduced to cartooning or poster painting, all music confined to the blaring of Rock 'n Roll, and all literature limited to "Best Sellers."

Hence, whether we are concerned with morality or kashrut or Shabbat or ethical conduct, the Torah warns us against mimicry. We must imitate neither "the doings of the land of Egypt" nor those of the "land of Canaan." The loyal Jew must retain the full force of his humanity and not cut down his ideals to conform to the level of his practice. The normal must never be identified with the merely average.

It is therefore a matter of special concern that in both our countries there has in recent years emerged an effort to reformulate the traditional moral code which the Western world has inherited from Judaism -- in effect, a movement to transform the "normal" in moral conduct. What is most startling is that this "New Morality" has won the sanction of the avant-garde churches. According to this doctrine, all that really counts in human relations is that the relations be human; that no relationship ever be such as to hurt or offend another and that, on the contrary, the purpose of all activity be the entry into "meaningful personal relationship." Other than this, however, the New Morality sees no reason to respect any inherited "taboos," and is willing to abandon all traditional moral restraints.

Now we can have no quarrel with the New Morality's emphasis on respect for the human personality. In a progressively dehumanizing world, such reminders of the integrity of personality are all to the good, though they are by no means novel. Yet, having said that, there is little else to commend the New Morality and much to condemn it.

This is not the place to undertake a full critique of this new movement or mood. Let us merely sum up our major objection to it by saying that it is based on a deliberate and catastrophic confusion of the average and the normal. Reading the literature of the New Morality, and especially its theological advocates in "progressive" Christian circles, leads one to the sad conclusion that what we have here is the hypersophisticated enshrinement of the debased average as the approved normal. The New Morality is a misguided cult of moral mediocrity only barely redeemed by its ethical motif. Ethical it may be; moral -- certainly not.

Apparently, many of the younger members of some of the Churches have become frightened by the obvious failure of Christianity in this Secular City. Their reaction has been analogous to what Reform did in response to the inroads into traditional Judaism as a result of the Emancipation: since most people do not observe, change the law to conform to accepted practice. The average was endowed with the halo of the normal, and the ideal reduced to the real.

Hence, the hegemony of numbers, the enthronement of statistics. In both cases -- the Reform capitulation in the last century in "ritual" matters, and the Christian devaluation of morality in sexual matters -- we are confronted with a failure of nerve, the inability to hold on to fixed ideals and principles amidst the turbulence of

social movement and widespread neglect of the norms of right conduct.

In the present case of moral relations, there is evident a bad case of despair. It is the act of a desperate religious community when it abandons its soul and, in order to hold on to its adherents and appeal to the masses, gives its seal of ecclesiastical approval to "the doings of the land of Egypt... [and] "the doings of the land of Canaan."

There is, furthermore, an irrational element to this rejection of Jewish morality in the name of a shallow personalistic ethic. Will people really be happier and "fulfilled" when society countenances adultery and various forms of degeneracy? Will children be brought up in a healthier atmosphere when the family has disintegrated as a direct result of the new dispensations of the New Morality? The end of the verse cited at the beginning reads, "neither shall ye walk in their statutes." The last word, in the Hebrew, is *chukot*. The late Rabbi of Lwow, Rabbi Joseph Saul Kathanson, of blessed memory, pointed out that when this term is applied to a commandment, it usually denotes a *mitzvah be'li taam* -- a command without reason, a statute which defies easy rational explanation. Apparently, there are also *averot be'li taam* -- transgressions which have nothing reasonable to commend them. And, surprisingly, there are people who find themselves attracted to these irrational and pointless offenses so that the Torah must explicitly warn us: "neither shall ye walk in their *chukot*." What the New Morality has done, with the *hekhsher* of some Church groups, is to propose moral doctrines which lack *taam* -- reason, or taste. Even more than a failure of nerve, this represents a failure of intelligence.

We Jews have only one standard of normality: the Halakhah. Our norm (law) is the law of the Torah. The validity of our Halakhah remains unaffected by the magnitude of the defection from its observance. The normal Jew is one who studies Torah and performs *mitzvot* -- even if the average Jew has little connection with this kind of life.

Moses was told concerning Aaron that "he shall not come at every time (*be'khol et*) into the sanctuary." And Hasidim interpret that as "with all that is timely." Not all that is fashionable in culture or stylish in philosophy or modish in morality must be brought into the sanctuary of Jewish life and be declared acceptable for the Jew. As Torah Jews we remain ever cognizant of the gap between the "is" and the "ought," between the normal and the average, between morality and mores, between the law of the Torah and all the "doings" of the Egyptians and Canaanites. Does this mean that Orthodox Jews must isolate themselves in little insular ghettos, whether residential or mental? No, it does not. We have several generations of successful experience with the blending of Torah values with the study of secular culture. But this by no means implies blanket approval of all of Western civilization. We can certainly not accept as final, ultimate, or genuine the moral judgments and ethical standards and religious norms of a world which countenanced an Auschwitz -- an obscenity

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which will haunt Western culture until it vanishes into obscurity.

Rather, we neither ignore nor accept the canons of the contemporary secular civilization. We do study, examine, discuss, contemplate, and engage in dialogue with it; and on the basis of Torah as our norm we evaluate it critically, accepting the good and rejecting the bad. Above all, this judgment of the average by the normal, of the real world by the ideals of the Torah, is a redemptive act. Our task is to redeem all the world through Torah. "And ye shall be holy unto Me; for I the Lord am holy, and have set you apart from the peoples, that ye should be Mine" (Lev. 20:26). In the beginning only the people of Torah belong to Him -- *ve'heyitem li*. That special relation of the Jew to his Maker is reinforced by his separateness from other peoples, by his obstinate refusal to assimilate, by his stubborn rejection of "the doings of the land" of Egypt and Canaan, But the purpose of this apartness is noblesse oblige: "that ye should be Mine" -- ye, all the peoples of the world, even Egyptians and Canaanites, will be redeemed from the crass average by the nobility of the normal and thus be "Mine."



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Sefer Kol Aryeh

Harav A. Leib Bakst zt"l (the Rosh Yeshiva of Detroit)
As recorded by Rabbi Dovid Godfrey. Translated with AI assistance
Motzaei Shabbos Parshas Acharei Mos Kedoshim 5756
קדושים תהיו – שמירת המעלה

[Intrinsic Kedushas Yisrael that Cannot be Waived]

[Rav Leib Bakst was my mother's first cousin. So, I had the privilege of observing a Gadol up close. Rav Bakst's essay on שמירת המעלה is all the more remarkable to those who knew Rav Bakst, as he was considered one of the most unassuming and modest of all the great American Roshei Yeshiva. CS]

1. The laws of כהונה are unique to the tribe chosen for special honor within Klal Yisrael, and their status stems from their elevated kedusha as stated in the pesukim ויקרא כ"א ו-ח' קדשים יהיו לאלקיהם וגו' כי את אשתי הי' להם אלקיהם הם מקריבים והיו קדש אשה זנה וחללה לא יקחו וגו' כי קדש הוא לאלקיו וקדשתו כי את להם אלקיך הוא מקריב קדש יהיה לך וגו'.

These halachos cannot be changed or waived, as derived from וקדשתו בעל כרחו, meaning that if a כהן refuses to separate from prohibited relationships he is compelled until he complies, as stated in Chazal. Similarly, a nazir who separates from wine and tumah attains a high level and is called kadosh as it says כל ימי נזרו קדש הוא לה', and it is obvious that a nazir cannot simply relinquish his kedusha to permit himself wine or tumah.

However, from another angle we find in the mitzvah of השבת אבידה that a זקן may refrain from retrieving a lost object when it is not fitting for his kavod derived from והתעלמת פעמים שאתה. Even so, it is considered proper to go beyond the letter of the law and return it, as in the case of Rabi Yishmael son of Rabi Yosi who acted משורת הדין. This requires an explanation, what is the difference between retrieving an אבידה that the זקן can forego his honor and כהונה where the כהן cannot waive his status, and likewise a נזיר cannot waive his nezirus.

I recall that in Shanghai there was a כהן עם הארץ who wished to marry a divorcee, and he sent כתב התפטרות (resignation) from his כהונה status, which he even had notarized. Clearly such an idea is absurd. A כהן or nazir cannot waive their status, because their status is not merely an exemption from a mitzva but an intrinsic מדרגה that cannot be waived.

The distinction is that there are two categories, mitzvos and מעלות. Within mitzvos there are פטורים and חיובים, and one may forego the exemption, and even when the exemption is due to kavod, the proper approach is humility and to perform the mitzvah. Therefore a זקן who returns an aveidah despite kavod is acting משורת הדין not to rely on an exemption [as permitted by רס"ג סעיף ג']. But מדרגות and נזירות are not merely obligations, they are מעלות, and one who attains such a level must preserve it. As the Ibn Ezra explains איש כי יפליא לנדר נדר נזיר, that he performs something wondrous, since most people follow their desires. By separating, he rises to a higher מדרגה similar to a כהן. One who possesses a מדרגה must guard it, and to violate it is a degradation, not humility.

2. The Ramban explains on קדושים תהיו that this extra level of kedusha applies to all of Klal Yisrael. After citing Rashi that it refers to separation from עריות and עבירה, the Ramban adds that the Torah permitted many physical pleasures, such as marital relations, meat, and wine, and one could become ברשות התורה, indulging excessively while technically remaining within halacha. Therefore, the Torah commands a general פרישות [self-imposed restraint] from excess, to sanctify oneself even in permitted areas, guarding speech, consumption, and conduct, until one attains true פרישות.

Thus, all of Klal Yisrael are obligated to preserve their kedusha through restraint, and one who has a higher מדרגה must act with greater refinement. As the Rambam writes, just as a chacham is distinguished in his דעה, so too he must be distinct in his actions, in his food, speech, dress, and conduct, all of which should be refined and elevated. (Rambam, Hilchos De'os 5:1: ... כשם שהחכם ניכר בהכמתו... כך צריך שיהיה ניכר במעשיו... ויהיו כל המעשים האלו נאים ומתוקנים ביותר) Similarly the Sforno explains regarding a nazir that he must not profane his kedusha by engaging in matters beneath his level, just as a כהן גדול avoids certain involvements. This applies broadly, that one engaged in Torah must not compromise his status.

3. At times even בני תורה justify associating closely with those who are not בני תורה, claiming humility, saying that they are not particular about kavod and can relate to anyone. This is often a mistaken

humility, because it involves relinquishing one's מדרגה and the kedusha of Klal Yisrael, similar to a כהן waiving his כהונה. A תורה בן must maintain his distinct conduct in dress, behavior, and associations. Even activities done לשם שמים, such as exercise, must be conducted in a manner befitting a תורה בן, not imitating improper styles. One must preserve his מעלות in all aspects of life.

The Gemara defines חילול השם as behavior that causes others to be embarrassed by association. If a תורה בן associates with inappropriate public figures, it reflects degradation and חילול השם. Conversely, success and refinement create קידוש השם. Rav Yerucham Levovitz ז"ל [(1875–1936), famed mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva in Europe] stated that if a yeshiva bochur (residing by community member homes, as was common in Europe) commits עבירה there is still hope to correct him, but if he becomes attached to a תורה בבית and adopts his outlook, then the core מדרגה is lost. This is more severe, because it reflects a shift in identity, not a single failing.

Similarly, the Gemara states האוכל בשוק פסול לעדות, and Rashi explains that one who lacks self-respect degrades himself. One might think this is humility, but in truth it reflects a lack of appreciation of one's מדרגה, which is unacceptable.

4. The תלמידים of R' Akiva died because they did not show kavod to one another. This does not mean simple disrespect, but that they established an approach minimizing distinctions, treating all as equal and foregoing kavod. Although this may have been rooted in humility, it was flawed, because the proper approach of a תלמיד חכם is to recognize and honor the elevated status of a תורה בן. There is no place for humility that erases structure and kavod.

I recall that in Europe seating in shul reflected hierarchy, each person according to his standing. When arriving in America after WW II, I was told that here in shul everyone sits equally and no one is particular about kavod. This was presented as a virtue, but in truth it reflects a loss of structure and מדרגה. Equality in this sense erases important distinctions and מדרגות that are important.

5. All beings possess a מדרגה, as man is created בצלם אלקים. This obligates conduct that reflects that status, as רבינו יונה [13th century Rishon] writes that all creation exists for kavod Shamayim, and one who fails to fulfill this purpose undermines his very essence.

Kedushas Hashem is expressed through speech, behavior, and all aspects of life, demonstrating that avodas Hashem is central.

Thus, a תורה בן should not disregard his מדרגה. A parable is given of a person who wishes to live like an animal, abandoning human dignity. Such behavior would be rejected, because man cannot live as a בהמה. So too, abandoning spiritual dignity is not humility but degradation of אלקים צלם.

Every דבר שבקדושה requires conduct that reflects its kedusha.

Regarding Shabbos, the Torah says ויקדש אותו and Chazal explain that one's clothing, speech, and conduct must differ from weekday behavior, so that its מדרגה is recognizable.

6. In all matters of Kedushas Yisrael there is no place for a waiver, and all of Klal Yisrael are obligated to preserve it. This explains the Ramban regarding the avoda zara *Molech*, where the Torah emphasizes חילול מקדש, referring to Klal Yisrael itself. The Ramban explains that the entire הארץ must act, because such acts damage the kedusha of the entire nation and cause the שכינה to depart.

The severity lies in the fact that it is a חילול of Kedushas Yisrael, and therefore all are responsible to remove those who destroy that מדרגה, in order to preserve the kedusha of Klal Yisrael.

RAV SCHACHTER ON THE PARSHA Vol 1

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Rav Hershel Schachter Adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman

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PARSHAS KEDOSHIM – HOLINESS

[Defining and Achieving Jewish Holiness]

THE MISHNAH (Avos 3:14) teaches, "Beloved is Man, for he was created betzelem (in the image of G-d) . . . Beloved is Yisrael, for they are called banim laMakom (children of the Omnipresent)." The explanation of this distinction would seem to be that non-Jews have the potential to develop the middos Elokus (characteristics of G-dliness) within themselves. Bnei Yisrael, however, have a "tzelem Elokim squared," a deeper degree of "the image of G-d" - innate spiritual qualities that we possess from Hashem Himself. Just as children possess the genes of their parents, banim laMakom means that a Jew is not born as a tabula rasa; rather, he has the middos Elokus as "spiritual DNA" already built into his system. Therefore, the passuk that teaches, "קדשים תהיו כי קדוש אני ד' אלקיכם - You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d" (Vayikra 19:2) can be understood as follows. Since I, Hashem, have kedushah and I created you, Bnei Yisrael, with a status of banim laMakom, you are obligated to preserve that degree of kedushah already implanted within you and not to distort that tzelem Elokim. This seems to parallel the passuk, "והלכת בדרכיו - And you shall go in His ways" (Devarim 28:9). This is not a mitzvah to imitate something that we are not. Rather, we are commanded to maintain the "ways of Hashem" that we were born with, to see to it that we do not tarnish those middos Elokus. The very next passuk explains the natural consequence of successfully going in the ways of Hashem: "וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ד' נקרא עליך - Then, all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you."

From the proper way in which we conduct ourselves, we will serve as לאור גוים - "a light unto the nations" (Yeshayah 49:6). Once we will demonstrate by example that we have succeeded in preserving our tzelem Elokim, the result, as described in the end of the passuk, will be: "ויראו ממך - the nations of the world will learn from us how to act with yir'as Shamayim." The nations of the world also have tzelem Elokim, albeit not to the degree of banim laMakom, and they will be able to learn this lesson from Bnei Yisrael and preserve that tzelem Elokim (Gr"a, Divrei Eliyahu). Just as a firstborn child is expected to aid his parents in the raising of his siblings, Bnei Yisrael, referred to as בני בכורי ישראל - "My firstborn son, Yisrael" (Shemos 4:22), are called upon to serve as role models for the nations of the world. This is what being the Am HaNivchar (Chosen Nation) means - that we have the responsibility to influence the other nations by impressing upon them the values of honesty, integrity, and decency by which we live.

On the passuk, "ויכל לדבר אתו ויעל אלקים מעל אברהם, - And when He had finished speaking with him, Hashem ascended from upon Avraham" (Bereishis 17:22), the Bereishis Rabbah (47:8) comments: "the Avos, they themselves were the Divine chariot." There was a continuous hashra'as haShechinah upon the Avos. The Mesillas Yesharim (perek 26) understands that this quality was not limited to the Avos, but applies to all tzaddikim who are a

merkavah laShechinah. A tzaddik is supposed to act with a degree of kedushah, maintaining the tzelem Elokim that was implanted within him, so that the Divine Presence is recognizable through his actions. Bnei Yisrael, as banim laMakom, are required to act in keeping with their unique status. They should dress and speak properly, in a dignified and honorable fashion, and not like the lower class of society. The basis of the obligation of kavod habriyos is due to Man's creation betzelem Elokim. This obligation not only applies in regard to others, but also obligates every person to maintain his own self-dignity. This is the simple explanation of the Ramban's comment regarding נבל ברשות תהיו that the Torah warns that one not be a נבל ברשות - "degenerate within the parameters of what is permitted by the Torah." Since, according to Torah law, one may marry many wives, one could arrange that he would always have one of his wives available to him. A person could be careful to make sure that all the food he eats is kosher, but eat in a gluttonous fashion. Such a person, without refined eating habits and an elegant style in his interpersonal relations, is one who is a נבל ברשות התורה which the command קדשים תהיו addresses.

Many have the mistaken impression that a life of asceticism, consisting of frequent fasting, abject poverty, and withdrawal from social interaction, is considered to be a life of kedushah. This does not seem to be in line with Yahadus's definition of kedushah. The Gemara in Yoma (86a) understands the passuk, ואהבת את ד' אלקיך - "You shall love Hashem, your G-d" (Devarim 6:5), to include the requirement שיהא שם שמים מתאהב על ידך - "that the name of Heaven become beloved through you." One should act in such a way that those who observe him should "fall in love" with Hashem. People should see the way a Jew acts and become so enamored with Yahadus that they feel compelled to join the Jewish religion. Clearly, in our world, one who lives an ascetic lifestyle will not likely be able to influence others.

Rav Shimon Shkop zt"l (introduction to Sha'arei Yosher) provides an additional understanding of קדשים תהיו. He defines kedushah as doing for others. The Midrash on קדשים תהיו considers whether the Torah requires that we attain a level of kedushah identical to that of Hashem Himself. The Midrash concludes that since the passuk continues, כי קדוש אני ד', we understand that מקדושתכם - "My kedushah is of a higher level than yours" (Vayikra Rabbah 24:9). [The sefer Da'as Sofer (p. 214) explains that the Tanna'im expounded the passuk in this way because קדשים תהיו is written in the chaser (incomplete) form, without a "vav," while כי קדוש אני is in the malei (full) form, with a "vav," implying that only Hashem has the full degree of kedushah.]

Using his definition of kedushah, Rav Shimon explains the Midrash as follows. Hashem is totally altruistic, as He lacks nothing; He never does anything for His own benefit. Therefore, Chazal considered the possibility that we too must be required to concern ourselves exclusively with the needs of others, ignoring our own needs. However, just as Rabbi Akiva posits, חייך קודמים להיי חבירך - "Your own life takes precedence over your fellow's life" (Bava Metzia 62a), Chazal here conclude קדושתך למעלה מקדושתכם, that human beings should not act in the completely altruistic fashion of Hashem. Rav Shimon suggests this as an interpretation of the Mishnah, אם אני איך - "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself, what am I?" (Avos 1:14). A person must be somewhat selfish; he cannot negate his own needs. However,

it is improper to have the attitude that he will act exclusively for himself. Rather, when he is satisfying his own needs, it must be with the recognition that "if I am for myself, what am I?" He must broaden his definition of self to include his spouse, his family, his community, his nation, and ultimately the whole world. He is doing for himself, but he views himself as part of a larger group; he extends "himself" to include the concerns of many others. According to Rav Shimon, the Ramban's warning not to be a נבל ברשות התורה means that if one involves himself with an overabundance of food and marriage partners, that pursuit will not spill over to help those many others. It will satisfy him alone. One must be selfish enough to meet his own needs only to the extent that by doing so he will be in the position to enable others to satisfy their needs. He will then be able to extend assistance to the many others who are dependent upon him. There is an ancient custom to read Megillas Rus on Shavuot. It is usually assumed that the connection between these two is that they share the element of geirus. Ma'amad Har Sinai is considered to have been the national geirus of Bnei Yisrael (see essay on Parshas Mishpatim), and this Megillah describes the geirus of Rus (Bi'ur HaGr"a, Orach Chaim 490:9, from Avudraham). We may, however, suggest an additional connection. There is a famous Midrash that teaches that Megillas Rus does not include dinim relating to tum'ah or taharah, to issur or to heter. It was written entirely to teach us the great reward reserved for those who bestow acts of kindness upon others (Rus Rabbah 2:15). Because Rus was so kind to her impoverished and widowed mother-in-law, Na'omi, Rus was rewarded by having the Malchus Beis Dovid descend from her. It is interesting that according to Rav Shimon's understanding, bestowing acts of kindness upon others is synonymous with the concept of kedushah. This is the reason Megillas Rus, the "Megillah of kindness," is also the "Megillah of geirus," because geirus is the acceptance upon oneself of kedushas Yisrael.

Mesillas Yesharim (perek 26) seems to present yet another definition of קדשים תהיו. By way of introduction, the Radak comments on the passuk, משה עבד ד' - "Moshe, servant of Hashem" (Yehoshua 1:1), that the term "eved Hashem" should be understood in the same way as one who is a servant to his human Master. In regard to the acquisitions of an eved, Chazal teach, מה שקנה עבד קנה רבו - "Whatever a slave acquires, his Master automatically acquires" (Pesachim 88b). Moshe is described as an eved because his entire life was dedicated to the service of Hashem. He led his life for the sole purpose of the performance of mitzvos. He gave himself over to Hashem and belonged fully to Him. This is similar to Rashi's comment on the passuk, וירד משה מן ההר אל העם - "Moshe descended from the mountain to the people" (Shemos 19:14). Moshe did not attend to his own business, but rather went directly from the mountain to the people. This attitude is not only reserved for tzaddikim; Hashem desires that all of us be avadim, כי לי בני ישראל עבדים - "For Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me" (Vayikra 25:55). The Rambam (Hilchos Deos 3:2) elaborates on this theme in explaining the passuk, בכל דרכיך דעהו - "In all your ways know Him" (Mishlei 3:6). Whatever one does in the course of his daily life, including eating, sleeping, or working, should be done leshem Shamayim. For example, eating a nutritious meal in order to maintain good health, including some dessert to put one in a good mood, can be viewed as being done leshem Shamayim. However, excessive eating, as in the Ramban's description of the נבל ברשות התורה, is not

performed for the sake of good health and cannot be viewed as being done leshem Shamayim. Following this approach to life is how one can "know" Hashem in all of his ways.

The sefer Yesod VeShoresh Ha'Avodah (sha'ar 1, perek 8), elaborating on what he refers to as the "klal hagadol (great principle) of the Chovos HaLevavos" (Sha'ar Avodas Ha'Elokim, perek 4), teaches that there are not really three categories of human activities - obligatory mitzvos, prohibited aveiros, and a middle category of devar reshus (optional activities). In truth, there are only two categories, because the term devar reshus is a misnomer. The middle category is termed devar reshus only because those activities are not absolute mitzvos or aveiros, but rather are dependent upon one's particular circumstance. In the case of food, for example, if one must consume a given food to be healthy and satisfied, then partaking of the food is obligatory. If the food is unnecessary and excessive, it is prohibited to partake of it. There is no truly optional activity that one has the choice to perform or to abstain from.

This is the basis of the Mesillas Yesharim's concept of kedushah. Just as כהנים אוכלים ובעלים מתכפרים - "the Kohanim eat [the korban] and the owners then gain atonement" (Pesachim 59b), a purely physical act can be a source of great spirituality as long as it is performed leshem Shamayim. Once considered within the realm of kedushah, the concept of פשטה קדושה בכלולה - "the sanctity spreads through the entire being" (Kiddushin 7a) will apply to it. Moreover, the principle of מוסיפין מהול על הקודש - "we add from the profane (weekday) onto the holy" (Yoma 81b) applies. Whenever it can, kedushah spreads and extends itself. The purely physical acts performed leshem Shamayim will lead to a sense of פשטה קדושה בכלולה and all of one's actions, בכל דרכיך, will be considered leshem Shamayim.

Perhaps we may add the following contemporary message. On the phrase קדשים תהיו Rashi quotes the comment of Chazal, "Be removed from the forbidden relationships and from sin [of immoral nature], for wherever you find restriction of immorality, you find kedushah." The Mishnah reports a related teaching of the Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah, עשו סייג לתורה - "Make a guard for the Torah" (Avos 1:1). Mesillas Yesharim (perek 26) writes that it is a common mistake to think that the obligation to create harchakos (safeguards) rests solely on the Sanhedrin. In truth, the obligation, ושמרתם את משמרת, (Vayikra 18:30), expounded to mean, עשו משמרת למשמרת, - "Make a safeguard for My charge" (Yevamos 21a), devolves upon each individual as well. Whatever Chazal saw fit to prohibit as a seyag is applicable in every place and time, in all situations. But each person, depending on his own occupation, society, and generation, must realize that if he finds himself in a situation in which he may be led to sin, he must make his own personal harchakos. We live in a society with a great deal of pritzus and geneivah, and it would seem that we are obligated to make our own personal harchakos in these areas.

While it is true that one should endeavor to lead his life in a manner that is מעורבת עם הבריות - "compatible with people" (Kesubos 17a), "that only applies if they are humans who conduct their lives as humans, not if they are humans who perform animalistic actions" (Mesillas Yesharim, perek 5). The Torah warns us specifically, "Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled, and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you" (Vayikra 18:3). There is, of course, much that is positive that we can learn and gain from the nations of the world. The Midrash teaches, אם יאמר לך אדם יש חכמה בגוים תאמין - "If one will tell

you there is wisdom by the nations, believe it" (Eichah Rabbasi 2:17), and the Gemara describes certain rules of etiquette that we gleaned from the Persians (Berachos 8b). We must be extremely careful, however, not to pick up the negative characteristics of the lower levels of society. In order to properly differentiate, one needs to have a strong masorah, which informs our attitudes, not just our halachic system. Proper hashkafah is also part of our Torah SheBe'al Peh tradition. This is clearly indicated by the opening line of Pirkei Avos, the Maseches dedicated to the transmission of what the Torah considers to be ethical behavior: משה קבל תורה מסיני - "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai."

The Yalkut HaRe'uveini (from Midrash HaNe'elam) attributes great significance to the inverted nunim found before and after the section of ויהי בנסוע הארון in Parshas Beha'aloscha (Bamidbar 10:35-36), teaching that the non-Jews have been excluded from these nunim and that it is through these nunim that Hashem is destined to redeem Bnei Yisrael in the times of Mashiach. The word "nun" in Aramaic means fish, and the Gemara in Avodah Zarah (39a) tells us that a sign of a kosher fish is that it possesses a spine, enabling it to survive in a river in which the waters flow forcefully. The inverted form of these nunim, then, represents the idea that the Jewish People must be like the kosher fish, which has the ability to swim upstream, against the powerful force of the current of societal pressure. One must consult with our ba'alei masorah to determine which aspects of our society are acceptable and lend themselves to an attitude of מעורבת עם הבריות and which unacceptable aspects require of us to be unyielding, to travel against the tide.

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subject: Rav Frand - What Might Have Been? Mourning Past Tragedies

Rav Frand

Parshas Acharei Mos

What Might Have Been? Mourning Past Tragedies

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1378 – Standing Up for One's Parents – Why Don't Most People Practice This Mitzvah? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Acharei Mos begins with the pasuk: "Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem and they died." (Vayikra 16:1). Parshas Acharei Mos describes the intricate avodah (priestly service) of Yom Kippur in the Beis Hamikdash. In fact, this is the krias Hatorah of Yom Kippur. In many machzorim, there is a comment from the Zohar printed at the beginning of this krias Hatorah, which states that if someone sheds tears when he hears the words "After the death of the two sons of Aharon," he will be saved from losing any of his children during his lifetime. In other words, if a person shows his compassion and empathy for Aharon's loss of Nadav and Avihu, it is a segula that he will be spared from a similar loss.

The Ponevezher Rav (Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman 1886-1969), zt"l, commented: Over the course of Jewish history, there have been many unfortunate incidents in Klal Yisrael where people have died, and yet we find no such similar segula – that crying for those who died in the

past will spare us from similar tragedy. What is unique about the death of Nadav and Avihu that should literally move us to tears? Anyone who knows anything about the life of the Ponevezher Rav will appreciate the answer he gave to his question. The Ponevezher Rav said that we know from the previous parsha (Shemini) that Nadav and Avihu were not just any two people from that generation. They were unique and special to the extent that Chazal say that Moshe Rabbeinu told his brother that he knew that the Mishkan would be sanctified through the death of those “close to Me,” but he thought that would be either himself or Aharon (see Rashi on the words “bikrovai akadesh” (Vayikra 10:3)). “But now that I see it was Nadav and Avihu who died during the sanctification of the Mishkan, I realize that they were greater than you and me.”

It is hard to imagine, but Moshe Rabbeinu said that Nadav and Avihu were greater in certain respects that even Moshe and Aharon! If that is the case, said the Ponevezher Rav, what type of effect would the leadership of Nadav and Avihu have had on Klal Yisrael, if it would have had a chance to come into effect? Consequently, the death of Nadav and Avihu is not just a singular event that affected Aharon Hakohen. Rather, not having two leaders like Nadav and Avihu had a generational effect. It effected the entire generation that did not benefit from being led by Nadav and Avihu, who were even greater than Moshe and Aharon. The whole nature of Klal Yisrael could have been changed by being led by these two great figures.

Rav Kahaneman explained an incredible insight into the Holocaust based on this explanation. Six million Jews were killed. Among them were many gedolei olam and gedolei Yisrael. Great roshei yeshivos were killed – such as Rav Elchonon Wasserman, Rav Menachem Zamba; and great admori”m with whole courts of chassidic followers were just wiped out. Beyond that, millions of pious individuals, men of action, beautiful Jews, were killed. What would Klal Yisrael have looked like had there not been a Holocaust? It would have changed everything.

Here we are, eighty years post-Holocaust, so we are finally demographically getting back to where we were. Torah has been rebuilt. Chassidus has been rebuilt. But the Holocaust remains a tragedy of untold dimensions. If by Nadav and Avihu, we need to cry because we think ‘what could have been?’ so too, we must ask ourselves ‘What would have been had there not been a Holocaust?’

These thoughts are obviously related to the days of the sefiras haomer counting as well. During these days, we mourn the 24,000 talmidim (students) of Rabbi Akiva. These people were all future tana'im, disciples of the great Rabbi Akiva. There would have been 24,000 more tana'im. What effect would they have had on the future of Klal Yisrael? There are certain tragedies that have national ramifications, not only for their generation but for all future generations as well.

That is why we need to mourn the tragedy of Nadav and Avihu, the tragedy of the Holocaust, and the tragedy of the 24,000 talmidim of Rabbi Akiva.

The Precious Ones of Jerusalem

The Gemara says in Maseches Yoma that significant effort was made to keep the Kohen Gadol awake on the night of Yom Kippur. They didn’t want the Kohen Gadol to fall asleep on that night. Bear that in mind when we think about the avodas Yom Hakippurim. Shavu'os is coming up and we know what it is like to stay up the whole night. We know what it is like when we get home at seven o’clock in the

morning. We make a bee-line for our beds and want to get into them as soon as possible. We know what we sometimes look like at three or four o’clock in the morning when we are falling asleep over our Gemara or whatever it is we are studying. It is tough to stay up at night.

But we don’t let the Kohen Gadol fall asleep. We try hard to keep him awake. One of the strategies the Gemara mentions is that the young kohanim stayed up with him on the night of Yom Kippur, learning with him and snapping their fingers at him if he seemed to be dozing off. But the Gemara says that there is another measure that they used. The “yakeeray Yerushalayim” (special people of Jerusalem) would stay up that night, moving around in the streets and creating a tumult and commotion. They did this to make noise so that the Kohen Gadol should not fall asleep. (Yoma 19b)

I saw an interesting observation from the present Tolner Rebbe: Why are they called the “yakeeray Yerushalayim?” Seemingly, this complementary title is specifically given to these people who used to roam the streets making a commotion on the night of Yom Kippur but not to the young kohanim who had a much more direct role in the process because they actually stayed up with the Kohen Gadol, trying in their own way to prevent him from falling asleep. They should also be called “yakeeray Yerushalayim!”

The Tolner Rebbe notes that the people who were in the chamber of the Kohen Gadol on the night of Yom Kippur had a tremendous opportunity and a tremendous honor. The Kohen Gadol got to know and interact with them personally! What an experience that must have been! Those who had the privilege of being with him that special night were among the chosen few of the entire population! On the other hand, the “yakeeray Yerushalayim” were anonymous individuals walking the streets, talking out loud, schmoozing and making a commotion. The Kohen Gadol didn’t know them. All he knew was that they were creating a racket outside that prevented him from falling asleep. There was no kavod and no sense of satisfaction in being part of this group. They were doing it anonymously, solely lishma (for the purpose of the a mitzva).

That earns them the title “yakeeray Yerushalayim.” When someone does something without the expectation of any kavod or any satisfaction, it is deserving of praise. The closest thing that I ever came to these pirchei kehuna was many years ago on Yom Kippur when I was still a bochur. Rav Ruderman, who was getting older, had to go home in the middle of davening. He asked me to walk home with him. I remember it vividly. The Rosh Yeshiva was in his tallis, his kittel and his hat. I was walking him home, arm in arm. Do you know what the Rosh Yeshiva told me on that night of Yom Kippur? Absolutely nothing. He walked in silence – which is itself a lesson. Rav Ruderman was a schmoozer – in learning and in other things – but that night of Yom Kippur, he said absolutely nothing. But, nevertheless, I was feeling good. I had the privilege of walking the Rosh Yeshiva home. I felt close to the Rosh Yeshiva.

So imagine these kids – the pirchei kehuna – the young kohanim sitting there in the Kohen Gadol’s chamber on the night of Yom Kippur. This is something they could tell their grandchildren about! But the “yakeeray Yerushalayim?” No one knew them. No one heard from them. Those who do that kind of thing in anonymity earn the title “the special ones of Jerusalem.”

We Only See Shortcomings in Other People

I saw an interesting Medrash Tanchuma: Bar Kapara in the name of Rabi Yirmiya ben Elazar states that the sons of Aharon died for four reasons. Because of: (1) “coming close” (2) the “offering” (3) the “foreign fire,” and (4) the fact that they did not consult with one another. The Medrash elaborates: “coming close” – that they entered the Kodesh Kadoshim (Holy of Holies). “The offering” – that they brought an offering they were not commanded to offer. The foreign fire” – that they brought fire that was not from the mizbayach (altar). “And they did not ask each other for advice before proceeding with their offering.”

We need to understand this last critique: The pasuk says that they brought the korban together. Clearly, they were partners in this ill-advised offering. The Medrash infers from the expression “ish machtoso” (each man his fire-pan) that they each independently had this idea to bring a foreign fire. They each took their own pan and did not consult with one another prior to this undertaking.

The question must be asked: If they both came up with this same idea of offering a fire that was not commanded, how would asking each other have helped?

Nadav: “You know what? — I’m thinking of bringing my own korban in the Kodesh Kodoshim.”

Avihu: “Hey! I was thinking the exact same thing! That’s a great idea!”

So what does the Medrash mean that they are culpable for not consulting with one another? If they would have consulted, would it have changed anything?

Rav Dovid Soloveitchik, z”l (1921-2021), shared an interesting observation: If they would have asked each other about the idea of bringing a korban that was not commanded into the Kodesh Kodoshim with a foreign fire, the other one would have responded, “Are you out of your mind!? You can’t do that. We are not permitted to do that!” Why would that have been his reaction if he himself was about to do the same thing? That this is a profound insight into human beings: The answer is that we see chisronos (shortcomings) in other people. We don’t see them in ourselves.

Many times, I see someone doing something and I say to myself “That’s not right!” or “That’s silly!” and then I turn around and notice that it is something that I also do. So how come I question this very action when I see someone else do it? The answer is that I see the flaw in someone else, but I don’t see it in myself.

If Nadav would have asked Avihu “What do you think of this idea?” Avihu would have been ready and capable of seeing and pointing out the shortcoming in his brother’s plan, even though he had been thinking along those very same lines himself.

The Medrash is implying that had they asked one another, perhaps they would have stopped each other. Like the Mishna (Negaim 2:5) says (in a play on words): A person may see all types of negaim other than his own negaim. A kohen may pasken the status of a tzaraas-like blemish on any other person, but he is unable to rule regarding his own tzaraas-like blemish. This is the straight halacha. The message of this halacha, however, is that a person cannot see his own blemishes. We don’t see our own shortcomings. We are very good at seeing them in other people, but not in ourselves.

The Medrash is implying that if Nadav and Avihu had asked each other before going ahead with their korbonos, each brother would have responded, “Hey! You cannot do that. You are going to be chayav meesah (deserving death).” However, they did not take

counsel from each other and therefore “the two sons of Aharon died” (Vayikra 10:2).

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem

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חיים שפתי חיים Rav Chaim Friedlander zt”l

[Rav Chaim Friedlander (1923-1986) was the Mashgiach in Ponevitzh yeshiva in B’nei Brak and Yeshivas HaNegev in Netivot]

Translated from original Hebrew

את משפטי תעשו ואת חקתי תשמרו ולכת בהם אני ה' אל-קיום - שמרתם את חוקתי ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי בהם אני ה'

Achrei Mos 18:4-5

חיי בהם [FOUR LEVELS OF AVODAS HASHEM]

Chazal darshen: חיי בהם ולא שימות בהם *you shall live by them and not die by them*. The simple understanding is that the Torah was given so that a person should live through it. Therefore, even issurim are set aside when necessary in order to preserve life, with only specific, exceptional cases where one must give up his life. However, we must further analyze the positive meaning of the pasuk חיי בהם. What exactly is this “life” that the Torah gives? Certainly, it does not refer merely to physical life. Rather, it points to a deeper form of vitality, the preservation and inner life of the נפש (*soul*), and only in rare cases is one commanded to sacrifice himself. We must still understand more deeply the חייב inherent in חיי בהם. What is this life that Torah provides? Clearly, it is not just גשמיים חיים. Rather, it relates to שמירת הנפש. This is why pikuach nefesh overrides the entire Torah.

In order to properly understand the meaning of חיי בהם, we must approach it through the framework explained by the Ramban (Achrei 18:4) who clarifies the different levels that exist within the true, spiritual life of a person:

רמב”ן אחרי מות 18:4 ודע כי חיי העולם הזה כפי הכנתו להם [א] כי העושה המצות שלא לשמן על מנת לקבל פרס יחיה בהן בעולם הזה ימים רבים בעושר ובנכסים וכבוד... [ב] וכן אותם אשר הם מתעסקין במצות על מנת לזכות בהן לעולם הבא שהם העובדים מיראה וזוכים בכוננתם להנצל ממשפטי הרשעים... [ג] והעוסקין במצות מאהבה כדין וכראוי עם עסקי העולם הזה יזכו בעולם הזה לחיים טובים כמנהג העולם ולחיי העולם הבא... [ד] והעובדים כל עניני העולם הזה ואינם משגיחים עליו כאילו אינם בעלי גוף וכל מחשבתם וכוננתם בבוראם בלבד כאשר היה הענין באליהו בהדבק נפשם בשם הנכבד יחיי

Level I: חיי בהם על מנת לקבל פרס Performing mitzvos for reward in this world

The first level: It is known that a person’s spiritual life within mitzvos is defined by his כוונה in performing them. One who performs mitzvos שלא לשמן in order to receive reward will merit through them an abundance of success in olam hazeh, wealth, possessions, and honor, as it says *in its left hand are wealth and honor*, and Chazal explain (שבת סג) that this refers to those who approach Torah in a secondary manner.

Although it is not proper to serve Hashem שלא לשמה in order to receive reward, nevertheless, as a preparatory stage toward לשמה, it is permitted to utilize שלא לשמה. At this level, however, a person’s avodas Hashem remains constrained within the framework of receiving reward. His entire orientation is still within olam hazeh. Accordingly, his “life” is defined by that framework, and his reward is given within that same plane, material success, wealth, and honor, since that is what he seeks.

This is also the meaning of what Chazal say *למינין בה סמא דחיי for those who take it with the right hand it is an elixir of life, and for those who take it with the left hand it is an elixir of death*. Rashi explains, *למינין* refers to those who engage in Torah בכל כוחם

לשמה, while לשמה refers to those who engage לשמה. If a person uses לשמה as a means to arrive לשמה, then Torah becomes for him חיים. But if he remains fixed לשמה and seeks only reward, then the Torah becomes, chas v'shalom, סם המות, because his entire sense of life is confined to the limited perspective of olam hazeh.

This idea is reflected in פסחים: in the distinction between גדול עד שמים, כי גדול מעל השמים חסדך and חסדך, כי גדול מעל השמים חסדך, for *Your kindness extends until the heavens* versus *Your kindness extends above the heavens*. As long as a person's framework remains within *olam hazeh*, even if elevated to the level of "the heavens," his *chesed* and his "life" are still bounded. But true חסד, and thus true חיים, are מעל השמים, beyond those limits. This reinforces that remaining within an *olam hazeh* orientation, even a refined one, is inherently limited.

Level II: **הם מתעסקין במצות על מנת לזכות בהן לעולם הבא שהם העובדים מיראה** **Performing mitzvos in order to merit in the next world**

The second level consists of those who engage in mitzvos in order to merit Gan Eden. This is עבודה מיראה, motivated by fear of punishment and desire for reward, and about them it is said ונפשם בטוב תלין, *their soul will rest in goodness*. They are saved from the judgment of the resha'im and attain a portion in *olam haba*. As the רמב"ן puts it: ולהיי עולם הבא וזכותם שלמות שם: זהו רמב"ן. This level represents a clear advancement over the first. There, the person's orientation was toward *olam hazeh*, whereas here his focus has shifted to a spiritual reality. Nevertheless, this is still not a complete level, since the *avodah* is driven by external considerations, namely שכר and עונש, rather than by the intrinsic truth of serving Hashem. It is therefore categorized as יראה, even though it yields real and lasting reward.

Accordingly, the "life" associated with this level is already a spiritual one, but it remains defined by what the person receives rather than by what he becomes. His connection to Torah and mitzvos is still mediated through the outcome they produce, even if that outcome is *olam haba* rather than *olam hazeh*.

Level III: **הם מתעסקין במצות מאהבה** **Performing mitzvos from love of Hashem**

The third level consists of those who perform mitzvos מאהבה, properly and in the correct manner, while engaging in *olam hazeh* only out of necessity.

Their involvement in the physical world is limited to what is required; it is not the מקום of their חיים. Rather, their true life is in the פנימיות of *avodas Hashem*, and *olam hazeh* functions only as a כלי to enable that *avodah*.

At this level, the person serves Hashem מתוך אהבה not out of a desire for reward, whether in *olam hazeh* or even in *olam haba*. This corresponds to the Rambam (הלכות תשובה פ"י) who writes התורה מצוות הברכות... אלא יעשה האמת מפני שהוא אמת *a person should not say I perform mitzvos in order to receive blessings... rather he should do the truth because it is truth*. Any שפע or success that comes is not the goal, but merely a means provided so that one can continue to serve Hashem.

Nevertheless, there is still a distinction to be made. One who serves Hashem in order to merit *olam haba* remains in the previous level, since his *avodah* is still defined by what he receives. Here, by contrast, the person's *avodah* is no longer oriented around שכר at all. Even when reward exists, it is incidental and does not define his חיים.

Accordingly, the "life" of this level is already of a different quality. It is not a life that comes from what a person attains, but from the *avodah* itself. The person is no longer living for something external; he is living עבודת ה'.

The reward of those who serve out of love: The reward of those who serve Hashem מאהבה is fundamentally different from the earlier levels. Even though they do receive reward, both in *olam hazeh* and in *olam haba*, that reward is not the objective of their *avodah*. Rather, it is given to them only as a means to enable and expand their *avodas Hashem*.

As the Rambam explains (הלכות תשובה פ"י), all the good that a person receives is not the purpose of mitzvos but a consequence of them. The brachos of *olam hazeh* are provided so that a person will have the ability and clarity to continue learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvos. Thus, success, health, and tranquility are not "payment," but conditions that allow for deeper *avodah*.

Accordingly, one who serves מאהבה does not view reward as something he is striving toward. Even when he receives שפע, it does not define his *life*, because his life is already rooted in the *avodah* itself. The *schar* he receives is therefore qualitatively different from that of the earlier levels. It does not constitute his חיים; it merely supports them.

This is the meaning of what the Rambam concludes, that the ultimate טוב is חיי העולם הבא. Not because it is a "reward" in the ordinary sense, but because it is the natural continuation and completion of a life lived in דבקות. For one who serves מאהבה, *olam haba* is not something separate that he attains; it is the extension of the very life he is already living.

Level IV: **מתוך דבקות בבוראם Serving Hashem העוברים כל עניני העולם הזה** **cleaving to Hashem**

The fourth level consists of those who serve Hashem גמורה in complete closeness to Hashem. At this level, a person no longer serves for any form of reward, not in *olam hazeh* and not even in *olam haba*. His entire *avodah* is rooted purely in אהבת ה' itself, without any external consideration. This represents the highest level of שלימות. Even the framework of "reward" no longer plays a role here. The person is not motivated by what he will receive, but by the עצם הקשר with Hashem. His חיים are not defined by attainment at all, but by the reality of that connection.

At this level, a person has already, in a sense, transcended the ordinary structure of שכר. He has refined himself to the point that he no longer requires external incentives, whether material or spiritual. His entire existence is directed toward *avodas Hashem*, and that itself is his life. This is the fulfillment of ואהבת את ה' אלוקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך *you shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might*, אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר. The person's vitality is the דבקות itself. He is not seeking life through Torah; he is living it fully through his connection to Hashem.

Accordingly, the meaning of והי בהם reaches its fullest expression here. The "life" of Torah is no longer something granted or even something cultivated. It is identical with the person's very existence, as he lives entirely עבודה ה'.

The body will receive its reward in olam haba together with the soul: To understand this level, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (רמח"ל) explains what benefit the body can receive. In order to remove the defilement of the sin of Adam HaRishon, the neshamah ascends to *olam ha'elyon* while the body remains below. Yet it is established that the body, too, will receive reward in *olam haba*. Since Hashem created man as גוף ונשמה together to serve Him, and together they carried out Torah and mitzvos, the ultimate reward must also be shared. Just as the body was a partner in the *avodah*, so too it shares in the reward.

The body's שלימות begins only after the neshamah has received its תיקון in the grave and has been refined in *olam ha'elyon*. The neshamah then returns, purifies the body, refines its חומר, and elevates it to its proper level. At that point, the neshamah becomes dominant, and the body becomes fit to receive from its radiance, as Chazal describe regarding *techiyas hameisim*.

This process culminates in a level where the body no longer acts as a barrier to the neshamah, but as an instrument through which its light is expressed. Although the neshamah remains spiritual and the body physical, the body is refined to the point that it can receive, in its own way, from the neshamah's radiance.

This is the meaning of the Ramban's statement that the *tzaddikim* will be resurrected and will not return to dust. Their bodies will become so refined that, after תחיית המתים, they will rise further, following a prior purification of both body and soul through which the חומר itself is transformed and made capable of sharing in that radiance.

Different dimensions of "life" based on a person's level of evaluation:

Chazal conclude, based on the Ramban, that the meaning of life varies according to the structure of אדם. As the Torah says: למען יאריך ימך *your days will be lengthened* that you may live and prolong your days, because a person's life is measured in accordance with his inner state. The true חיים are the eternal ones, as the Torah states אורך ימים בימינה

length of days is in its right hand, meaning that through Torah one attains a form of existence that is not limited to the physical. Accordingly, the Torah gives a person his true חיים, aligning with his level. Thus, the pasuk והי בהם refers to these higher חיים, not merely physical survival. As explained in (שער א פרק י"ד) שם הויה represents the totality of existence, and a person must attach himself to Torah and mitzvos in order to draw that חיים into himself. From this perspective, the earlier levels also take on new meaning. Even in the lower מדרגות, a person receives life in accordance with his level, and that life itself prepares him for the higher reality of olam haba. The higher levels, however, bring a person to a fundamentally different awareness. As the Rambam explains (הלכות תשובה פ"י), one who serves Hashem properly does so not for reward, but because the truth itself compels him. This awareness opens a person to a deeper experience of חיים, one rooted in connection rather than attainment. Chazal illustrate this with a משל: a person standing outside a palace longs to enter. As he draws closer, his desire intensifies until he reaches the entrance and is allowed inside. Once within, he no longer stands at a distance; he lives inside the palace itself. So too, a person initially seeks closeness to Hashem from afar, but through Torah and mitzvos he is gradually brought inside, until his entire existence is lived within that closeness. Even so, a person can engage in Torah and mitzvos without fully internalizing this awareness, if he does not connect them to their ultimate purpose. In such a case, he has not yet truly entered the deeper dimension of life that Torah offers. Ultimately, through avodas Hashem, a person must strive to internalize the Torah's truths so that they shape his entire being. Through this, he draws himself closer to Hashem and becomes worthy of receiving the true חיים, both in this world and in the next.

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Love Isn't Enough By Rabbi Moshe Taragin

There are so many powerful verses in the Torah. Some speak of divine presence in this world, whether through creation or through supernatural intervention. Others describe the historical covenant forged between Hashem and His people, centered upon His land. And there are those that articulate fundamental beliefs, such as Shema Yisrael, which distills faith into a few words. Finally, there are dramatic verses that trace the lives of our great Biblical figures, Avraham and Moshe, capturing their struggles and heroics. Yet the great sage Rabbi Akiva chose a different verse as the most essential in the Torah: "Ve'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho". Love your fellow as yourself. He places the center of Torah not in belief, but in the way a person turns toward others. Compassion, a readiness to step beyond the self, forms the bedrock of both human character and religious life. Without mercy and compassion, piety slowly erodes, losing its moral core.

The Language of Action

The centrality of loving another as oneself had already been articulated generations earlier by a different sage, an intellectual forerunner of Rabbi Akiva. Decades earlier Hillel had already placed this trait at the heart of religious life. A potential but impatient convert approached Shammai, requesting "conversion on one foot," what we would call "religion in fifteen minutes". Shammai, quite understandably, turned him away. Judaism cannot be absorbed in haste. The greatest minds across generations have devoted entire lives to probing the depth and divine mystery of Torah. Hillel responded differently. He recognized that not everyone arrives with the same patience or intellectual endurance. Rather than dismiss the request, he offered a point of entry. He directed the convert to focus on loving one's fellow as the core of religious experience, a principle simple enough to begin with, yet one that can guide a person through the entirety of religious life. Interestingly, Hillel did not merely identify love for another Jew as the central tenet of religious life. He gave it definition and measure. The command to love can remain abstract and difficult to grasp. People often hurt

those they love. Love and hurt often walk hand in hand. Hillel redirected the convert toward action rather than emotion. "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow". In reframing the command, Hillel made it concrete. It's not simple to feel love for every person. Jews, by nature, are confident and often stubborn. Differences in outlook inevitably lead to friction. Hillel wasn't asking for perfect emotion; he was guiding behavior. Treat others with dignity and respect, even when you disagree, even when they irritate you. Use your own expectations as the standard. Don't impose upon others what you yourself would find hurtful. Instead of speaking in abstract terms, Hillel anchored the mitzvah in daily conduct. This idea, to "treat others as you would wish to be treated", has spread far beyond its source to many religions. Many assume it appears explicitly in the Torah, but the Torah speaks in the language of love. Hillel translated that language into behavior, into something lived and practiced. Separated by only a few generations, Hillel and Rabbi Akiva arrived at a shared center. Treating others with dignity stands at the heart of Jewish identity. Among all the powerful verses in the Torah, this one emerges as central and can serve as a portal to growth in religious life.

The Image of Man

Yet this wasn't the only way to define the center of Torah. Interestingly, there was a dissenting voice. A different sage pointed to a very different verse as the most central in the Torah. Ben Azzai turned not to the command to love, but to a verse in Bereishis that describes the creation of man. In the fifth chapter, the Torah presents man as having been created b'tzelem Elokim, in the image of Hashem. Of course, this cannot refer to any physical likeness, as Hashem has no form or semblance. Rather, it points to a cluster of capacities that set human beings apart from the rest of the natural world. We possess (i) emotion, (ii) free will, (iii) moral awareness, (iv) self-reflection, (v) creativity, (vi) language, and (vii) the ability to form deep relationships. These qualities are either absent in other creatures or appear only in limited form. It's precisely this distinction that defines us. We stand apart from nature, and in that difference we reflect our Creator, who stands beyond nature entirely. Our distance from the natural order isn't accidental; it's the imprint of the Divine image within us.

By highlighting this verse instead of "Ve'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho," Ben Azzai introduced two important shifts. First, this verse isn't a commandment but an assertion about human nature. Hillel and Rabbi Akiva identified a formal mitzvah as central. Ben Azzai suggested that the axis of Torah values can emerge from a statement about who we are. Religious life is shaped not only by obligation, but also by how we understand the human being, by the moral awareness embedded within us and by the way we see the world and our place within it. It's striking that, in Ben Azzai's view, the central verse describes who we are rather than telling us what to do. Second, Ben Azzai widened the scope of compassion and respect from fellow Jews to humanity as a whole. The command to love your neighbor is directed toward those who are your ideological neighbors, those who share your identity and way of life. The verse in Bereishis speaks more broadly. Every human being is created b'tzelem Elokim. That shared divine imprint demands a wider circle of respect. Honoring another person is, in effect, honoring the One who fashioned him. When that respect is absent, it reflects not only a failure toward others, but a failure in our regard for Hashem.

Losing Hope

It's not always easy to respect every human being and the divine image within him. We stand at the edge of a major shift that may reshape how we understand ourselves. No one knows exactly where this is headed. Will AI elevate our sense of human dignity, as we begin to generate creativity itself? Or will this process continue to erode what makes us distinct and chip away at our image of man? This process has been unfolding for centuries. Copernicus taught us that our planet isn't the center of the universe. Darwin taught that we weren't created as wholly distinct, but share an evolutionary branch with other primates. Freud taught that we don't fully possess free will, but are often driven, almost irresistibly, by darker psychological forces within us. With each step, something of human uniqueness felt diminished.

Creativity remained one of the final markers of distinction. If even that begins to fade, how will we understand ourselves? This question will take time to unfold, but it will shape how we see the human being and what it means to be created in the image of Hashem.

Of course, even before any of this unfolds, the world already feels unmoored, gripped by hatred and drawn toward false narratives. The hostility we face, and the poor judgment we see around us, can tempt a person to lose faith in humanity. So many seem unable, or unwilling, to recognize the moral clarity of our cause. It's easy, in a world filled with hatred and antisemitism, to give up on man, or to lose faith in human potential. Ben Azzai reminds us that every human being carries that potential. People don't always rise to it, and at times they distort it. Still, to live as a believing Jew is to hold onto faith in humanity, even when that faith isn't easily earned.

<https://vinnews.com/2026/04/19/how-rav-dov-landau-shlita-saved-the-sheitels/>

How Rav Dov Landau Shlita Saved the Sheitels

April 19, 2026

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman

It was the spring of 2004. Frum women everywhere faced a quandary. In Brooklyn many of them set curbside bonfires of their own sheitels. In Beit Shemesh, women who had spent two thousand dollars on a sheitel traded it for a five-dollar kerchief overnight. In Far Rockaway, the Moros of the Beis Yaakovs went home as the schoolday began and changed their sheitels to tichels. In Cleveland, a frum girls' school actually closed for a day because the teachers did not know what to put on their heads.

The question racing through the community was simple and terrifying: was the sheitel on my head tikroves avodah zarah — an offering to idolatry, from which no Jew may derive any benefit at all?

More than two decades later, most of those women are again wearing sheitelach, many of them made from Indian hair. Perhaps the main reason for the turn around in the frum community has been the ruling from one of today's leading Gedolim: Rav Dov Landau, citing the Chazon Ish.

Who Is Rav Dov Landau?

Rav Ephraim Dov Landau was born in Zgierz, Poland, in 1930, grandson of the Strikover Rebbe, Rav Elimelech Menachem Mendel Landa. His family made it to Eretz Yisroel before the war, settling in Rechovot, where young Dov learned first at Yeshivas HaYishuv HeChadash and then at Ponevezh, where his chavrusos included Rav Yaakov Edelstein zt"l and his rebbeim included Rav Dovid Povarsky zt"l and Rav Shmuel Rozovsky zt"l.

He married Rebbetzin Adina Sher, a granddaughter of Rav Yitzchak Isaac Sher, the rosh yeshiva of Slabodka. In the early 1980s he was appointed to the roshei yeshiva of Slabodka in Bnei Brak, a position he holds to this day, together with his cousin Rav Moshe Hillel Hirsch.

With the petirah of Rav Gershon Edelstein zt"l in 2023, Rav Landau became, along with Rav Hirsch, the chairman of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of Degel HaTorah, and is widely regarded today as one of the zekeinim of the Lithuanian yeshiva world.

Although he was still a bocher when the Chazon Ish was niftar in 1953 — he considers the Chazon Ish his Rebbe Muvhak. He is today the rav of Chug Chazon Ish, and his halachic method is built, brick by brick, on Chazon Ish foundations. It was one of those foundations that he used to save the sheitels. The Problem with Indian Hair

Much of the world's supply of long, high-quality hair for wigs comes from India, and much of that hair is shorn in or near Hindu temples — most famously the Venkateswara temple at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh — where pilgrims submit to tonsuring as a religious act. The hair is then auctioned on the international market and eventually finds its way into sheitelach worn in Lakewood, Flatbush, Gateshead, and Yerushalayim.

In 2004 the question detonated. Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l, re-examining a teshuvah he had written in 1989 in light of new information about what actually happens at Tirupati, issued a ruling assuring that sheitels made from such hair were forbidden. Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita ruled

similarly. If the hair is tikroves avodah zarah, no benefit may be derived from it — not wearing it, not selling it, not even giving it away. The sheitel on one's head would have to be destroyed.

Other poskim — Rav Dov Landau among them — reached a different conclusion. To understand how, we need to travel first to the town of Tzaidan in the days of the Tannaim, and then to Bnei Brak in the days of the Chazon Ish.

A Tree in Tzaidan

The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (48a) tells of a tree in Tzaidan (Sidon) that was being worshipped as an avodah zarah. The townspeople were afraid to come near it. Rabbi Shimon instructed them: go examine the pile of offerings lying beneath its branches.

They did. And buried in the pile they found a small tzurah — a carved form, an image.

Rabbi Shimon's ruling was immediate and counterintuitive: the tree is permitted. You may use its wood, sit in its shade, benefit from it however you wish. The worshippers, he explained, were never really worshipping the tree. They were worshipping the form. The tree was merely furniture.

The Rishonim explain that the form itself, of course, remains forbidden to derive any benefit from — but the tree is free.

What looks like the object of worship is often not the object of worship. It is the basis of the following article.

The Chiddush of the Chazon Ish

The Chazon Ish (Yoreh Deah 62:21) asks a question that sounds almost philosophical but is in fact deeply halachic: when an idolater bows down before his idol, what exactly is he worshipping?

The Chazon Ish drew a line that no one had drawn so sharply before: you cannot make a korban to something that does not exist.

There are, he explained, two fundamentally different cases.

In the first case, a person worships something Hashem actually created — the sun, the moon, a particular star, a malach. This is real avodah zarah in the full halachic sense. All the laws of avodah zarah apply, including the prohibition of tikroves.

In the second case, a person worships a koach mufshat — an abstract power that he has invented in his own mind. This power was never created. It does not exist now, and it never existed. It is purely a figment of his imagination. In the second case, the Chazon Ish rules, we are not dealing with avodah zarah in the technical halachic sense at all. We are dealing with minus — heresy. A terrible sin, certainly. But a different category, with different halachic consequences.

The Chazon Ish anchors this in the Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zarah 2:1), whose careful formulation forbids worship of any created being — angel, sphere, star, element. Had the Rambam meant to forbid worship of every imagined power, he would have grounded the issur in "lo saasun lachem elohim."

He didn't.

Rather, the Rambam grounded it specifically in the worship of created things. The Chazon Ish finds confirmation in the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah, who labels one who attributes an image to Hashem a min — heretic — rather than an oveid avodah zarah.

From Bnei Brak to Tirupati

Rav Dov Landau applied this chiddush to the hair at Tirupati. His teshuvah appears in his sefer Minchas Dvar Mitzvah (ch. 26, in a footnote), and is cited as heter number fourteen in HaKetzeh'akta and more recently in Me'orei Simcha by Rabbi Simcha Friedman of Lakewood.

The question Rav Landau asked is the question Rabbi Shimon asked in Tzaidan. When a Hindu pilgrim stands before a statue in the Tirupati temple, what is he actually worshipping?

Based on the halachic testimony gathered by the poskim in 2004, Rav Landau understood the answer this way: Hindu theology, as described by its own adherents, posits an abstract spiritual power behind the physical statues. The statues themselves are not the deity; they are artistic representations of a koach mufshat, a power that the worshippers have conceived in their minds.

Different statues, different representations — one imagined power behind them.

And that imagined power, Rav Landau argued, was never created by Hashem. It does not exist.

Which places Hindu worship, by the Chazon Ish's criterion, squarely in the second category. Not avodah zarah but rather heresy.

Why This Permits the Hair

Once the classification shifts, the halachic consequences cascade.

Tikroves avodah zarah — the prohibition of deriving benefit from an offering to idolatry — requires, as a logical prerequisite, that there be avodah zarah to offer to. No avodah zarah, no tikroves. The hair shorn by pilgrims at Tirupati, however the pilgrims themselves may understand it, cannot halachically be an offering to something the halacha does not recognize as an object of worship in the first place.

Rav Landau adds a second point that strengthens the conclusion. Even within the temple complex, the shaving takes place in a separate area — not before the idol itself. So even one who disputes the first argument and maintains that Hindu worship does qualify as avodah zarah still has to contend with the fact that the hair was never placed before the idol as a formal offering.

The sheitel industry — and by extension, tens of thousands of women's daily donning had a halachic foundation to stand on.

A Subtle Distinction That Matters

The Chazon Ish's line is sharper than it first appears. It turns on a single criterion: was the object of worship ever actually created?

This means that worshipping the soul of a person who really lived is real avodah zarah. A soul is a created thing — it exists, it continues to exist after death (see Koheles 3:21 and Nazir 48a). To worship it is to worship something Hashem made.

But worshipping the soul of someone who never existed — a purely fictional figure — falls on the other side of the line. It is minus, not avodah zarah.

The distinction has implications well beyond sheitels, and poskim have debated its application to other religions. But it is the distinction itself that is the chiddush.

That is how Rav Dov Landau shlita saved the sheitels.

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<https://vinnews.com/2026/04/21/in-defense-of-the-sheitel-why-the-heter-still-stands-a-response-to-the-current-wave-of-attacks/>

In Defense of the Sheitel: Why the Heter Still Stands A Response to the Current Wave of Attacks

April 21, 2026

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman

A flood of emails has come in attacking the recent article on how Rav Dov Landau shlita saved the sheitels. Ads and articles are circulating that blame the sheitels for the recent car accident tragedies in Lakewood — and for cancer deaths and drownings as well. The senders assert that the Chazon Ish zt"l is wrong, that Rav Dov Landau shlita is wrong, and that the tens of thousands of bnos Yisroel who rely on psakim permitting the sheitels are walking around in aveirah.

What follows is the fuller halachic picture. Even if one wishes to attack the Chazon Ish's chiddush — and the attack does not succeed — his view is only one pillar among several in the heter. Even as a mere snif l'hakel, the heter stands firmly in the eyes of numerous Rabbonim and Poskim.

2004: The Year the Sheitelach Burned

In the spring of 2004, frum women faced a terrifying question: was the sheitel on one's head takroves avodah zarah — an offering to idolatry, from which no Jew may derive any benefit? In Brooklyn, women set curbside bonfires of their own sheitels. In Beit Shemesh, two-thousand-dollar sheitels were traded for five-dollar kerchiefs overnight. In Cleveland, a frum girls' school closed for a day because the teachers did not know what to put on their heads.

More than two decades later, most of those women are again wearing sheitelach, many made from Indian hair. The question has resurfaced —

several times by people and advertisements that stated that sheitels are forbidden, even with a hechsher, because in their view the hair comes from idolatrous rituals.

The Problem With Indian Hair

Much of the world's supply of long, high-quality wig hair comes from India, and much of that hair is shorn in property belonging to or near Hindu temples — most famously the Venkateswara temple at Tirupati — where pilgrims submit to tonsuring as a religious act. The hair is auctioned on the international market and finds its way into sheitelach worldwide.

The halachic question is rooted in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 139:6, based on the Gemara in Avodah Zarah 59b: no benefit may be derived from takroves avodah zarah. In 2004, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l — re-examining a teshuvah he had written in 1989 in light of allegedly new information about Tirupati — ruled that such sheitels were forbidden. Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita ruled similarly. A letter later circulated in New York shuls, signed by Rav Chaim Meir HaLevi Vosner (Rav and Av Beis Din of Zichron Meir), Rav Sriel Rosenberg (Raavad in Bnei Brak), Rav Yehuda Silman (Av Beis Din in Bnei Brak), Rav Shimon Bodni (Chaver, Moetzes Chachmei HaTorah), and Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp of Modiin, declaring that no hechsher can be trusted because temple hair has saturated the market. The letter cited an industry figure, Vince Selva of Indo Asian Human Hair International Inc., and listed 25 alleged "facts" about the human hair industry.

Other poskim — including Rav Yisrael Belsky zt"l and, most significantly, Rav Dov Landau shlita — reached a different conclusion. Their reasoning is a rope woven from several independent strands. Even if one strand frays, the rope holds.

Who Is Rav Dov Landau?

Rav Ephraim Dov Landau was born in Zgierz, Poland, in 1930, a grandson of the Strikover Rebbe. His family reached Eretz Yisroel before the war. He learned at Ponevezh, where his rebbeim included Rav Dovid Povarsky zt"l and Rav Shmuel Rozovsky zt"l. He married Rebbetzin Adina Sher, a granddaughter of Rav Yitzchak Isaac Sher of Slabodka. In the early 1980s he was appointed rosh yeshiva of Slabodka in Bnei Brak, a position he holds today together with his cousin Rav Moshe Hillel Hirsch. With the petirah of Rav Gershon Edelstein zt"l in 2023, Rav Landau became, with Rav Hirsch, chairman of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of Degel HaTorah.

Though still a bochur when the Chazon Ish was niftar in 1953, he considers the Chazon Ish his rebbi muvhak, and his halachic method is built brick by brick on Chazon Ish foundations. It was one of those foundations that he used to save the sheitels.

A Tree in Tzaidan

The Gemara in Avodah Zarah 48a relates that a tree in Tzaidan was being worshipped as avodah zarah. Rabbi Shimon instructed the townspeople to examine the pile of offerings beneath its branches. Buried in the pile they found a small tzurah — a carved form. Rabbi Shimon's ruling was counterintuitive: the tree is permitted. The worshippers, he explained, were never really worshipping the tree. They were worshipping the form. The tree was merely furniture. What looks like the object of worship is often not the object of worship. That insight forms the basis of what follows.

The Chiddush of the Chazon Ish

The Chazon Ish (Yoreh De'ah 62:21) asks: when an idolater bows before his idol, what exactly is he worshipping? He drew a line more sharply than anyone before him: one cannot make a korban to something that does not exist.

There are two fundamentally different cases. In the first, a person worships something Hashem actually created — the sun, the moon, a star, a malach. This is avodah zarah in the full halachic sense, and all the laws apply, including takroves. In the second, a person worships a koach mufshat — an abstract power he has invented in his own mind. This power was never created and does not exist. In this second case, the Chazon Ish rules, the matter is not avodah zarah in the technical halachic sense at all. It is minus — heresy. A terrible sin, but a different category with different

consequences.

The Chazon Ish anchors this in the Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zarah 2:1), whose careful formulation forbids worship of any created being — angel, sphere, star, element. Had the Rambam meant to forbid worship of every imagined power, he would have grounded the issur in “lo sa’asun lachem elohim.” Instead, he grounded it in the worship of created things.

Confirmation comes from the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah, who labels one who attributes an image to Hashem a min — heretic — rather than an ovoid avodah zarah.

From Bnei Brak to Tirupati

Rav Dov Landau applied this chiddush to the hair at Tirupati. His teshuvah appears in his sefer Minchas Dvar Mitzvah (ch. 26, in a footnote), and is cited as heter number fourteen in HaKetze’akasa and more recently in Me’orei Simcha by Rabbi Simcha Friedman of Lakewood.

When a Hindu pilgrim stands before a statue at Tirupati, what is he or she actually worshipping? Based on the halachic testimony gathered in 2004, Rav Landau understood that Hindu theology, as described by its own adherents, posits an abstract spiritual power behind the physical statues. The statues are not the deity; they are representations of a koach mufshat. That imagined power, Rav Landau argued, was never created by Hashem. This places Hindu worship, by the Chazon Ish’s criterion, in the second category — not avodah zarah, but heresy.

Takroves avodah zarah requires, as a logical prerequisite, that there be avodah zarah to offer to. No avodah zarah, no takroves. Rav Landau adds that the shaving takes place in a separate area within the temple complex — not before the idol itself. Even one who rejects the first argument must contend with the fact that the hair was never placed before the idol as a formal offering.

The Chazon Ish’s line turns on a single criterion: was the object of worship ever created? Worshipping the soul of a person who really lived is real avodah zarah — a soul is a created thing (see Koheles 3:21 and Nazir 48a). Worshipping the soul of someone who never existed falls on the other side of the line.

The Attacks

The emails argue, in essence, that the Chazon Ish is wrong — that all Hindu worship is full-fledged avodah zarah not heresy — and therefore Rav Landau’s heter collapses. Some go further, connecting recent tragedies to the sheitels that frum women are wearing. That requires a heavy answer.

Let’s be clear: attributing specific tragedies to specific aveiros is a path the Gemara itself warns us away from. The Gemara in Brachos 5a, and the Rambam in Hilchos Ta’aniyos, tell us to examine our deeds in times of difficulty — but they do not give any of us license to announce which aveirah of which person or persons caused which tragedy. That is nevuah, and nevuah has been gone for a long time.

The halachic attack, though, deserves a halachic answer. Even if someone wishes to reject the Chazon Ish’s chiddush entirely, the sheitels, according to many Pokim, are still permitted. The Chazon Ish is one strand. There are others.

Rav Belsky and the Nature of the Offering

I was personally present with Rav Yisrael Belsky zt”l when he both researched the issue and when he discussed it with the poskim in Eretz Yisroel. Dayan Dunner’s research concluded that the Indian women were actually giving their hair as an offering to “the gods,” and that the hair was therefore takroves avodah zarah. The research of others, including Rav Belsky zt”l, was that the women were offering to shave their hair as a sign of devotion, and that the hair itself was not the offering. According to that understanding, the hair is permitted. Rav Belsky discusses additional reasons for permitting it in his sefer Shulchan HaLevi page 438, where letters back and forth with Rav Elyashiv zt”l are printed.

Research at the time, including conversations with representatives at the Indian consulate, indicated that the hair itself is not an offering per se. The consulate official described tonsuring as a mark of personal devotion — the shaving itself is the avodah, not the hair that falls to the floor.

Further research revealed two different Hindu conceptions. Some pilgrims offer their hair as a sign of surrendering the ego. Others offer it in payment of a debt: according to Hindu lore, Vishnu took out a wedding loan so large it would take him thousands of years to repay, and devout Hindus “help pay off Vishnu’s debt” by offering their hair. Those donating on the second account would arguably be producing takroves avodah zarah; those on the first are not. Punari Aruni, a pilgrim who appears in the documentary Hair India, describes her own donation in the first terms — surrender of ego, not a gift.

Crucially, many hair exporters operate entirely outside the temple system. Agents approach men in Indian villages and pay them roughly \$10 for their wives’ hair (per a January 2014 article by Katie Rucke) — no temple, no “offering.” Even at Tirumala Venkateswara, the largest of India’s roughly 28 hair-exporting temples, the director has stated that pilgrims are not paid; the proceeds feed some 30,000 poor people daily. India exports roughly 2,000 tons of temple hair per year, but a substantial fraction is sold to stuff mattresses, manufacture oil filters, or extract amino acids for industrial use. The assumption that “all wigs must contain temple hair” is not supported by the industry data.

The Sfek Sfaika: Not Three Doubts, but Four or Five

This brings us to the second independent pillar of the heter — entirely separate from the Chazon Ish, and unaffected even if one rejects his chiddush entirely. Sheitels bearing a proper hechsher are permitted through the halachic mechanism of sfek sfaika, which the Shulchan Aruch deploys throughout, including in Yoreh De’ah 122:6.

A careful count yields not three but four, and arguably five, independent halachic safeikos. Each is logically distinct — each would need to resolve against the sheitel for the prohibition to apply.

Doubt One — the worshipper’s own intent. Even granting arguendo that Hindu worship is avodah zarah, is the individual pilgrim actually worshipping the physical idol, or an abstract koach mufshat? As documented above — through the Indian consulate, pilgrims like Punari Aruni, and the ego-surrender theology described by Hindus themselves — much of the donation is explicitly framed as personal devotion rather than a gift to a deity. This doubt operates on the side of the worshipper. This is also the official notion in their religious texts. But just as there are people and Jews who believe that a Kashrus symbol means that a Rabbi “blesses” the food rather than supervising the food — there are errors of conception in every community.

Doubt Two — whether the hair qualifies as a takroves. Even if the pilgrim is worshipping an idol, is the hair halachically an “offering”? Rav Belsky’s research concluded that the shaving itself is the avodah and the hair is simply what falls away — the byproduct of the devotional act, not the devotion itself. If a person cut off a thumb to demonstrate devotion to an idol, that would not automatically render the thumb a korban. Body parts shed during a devotional act may simply be different from objects brought before an idol. This doubt operates on the side of the offering.

Doubt Three — whether the shaving is even in the right place. Rav Landau notes that the tonsuring at Tirupati takes place in a separate building, not before the idol. A takroves requires a formal offering in the presence of the object of worship. Whatever happens in a separate shaving hall may not rise to that threshold. This doubt operates on the side of the ritual setting.

Doubt Four — whether any particular sheitel contains temple hair at all. Hair is collected from many countries. Much Indian hair is sourced from village agents with no temple connection. A large portion of actual temple hair is diverted to mattress stuffing, oil filters, and amino-acid extraction, never reaching sheitel manufacturers. For sheitels with a reliable hechsher whose supply chain has been investigated, the probability that the hair traces to a Tirupati tonsuring is reduced further still. This doubt operates on the side of the physical provenance.

Doubt Five — the status of commercially-sold hair. There is a strong halachic argument that once hair has been sold commercially at international auction, it is no longer considered takroves avodah zarah for the purposes of

combining with other safeikos, on account of bitul. This is the ruling of Rav Yosef Teumim in his Pri Megadim (siman 586), based on the Gemara in Zevachim 74a, which does not rule like Shmuel's stringent view that sfek sfaika cannot be applied to takroves avodah zarah. The Beis Shlomo (Orach Chaim 30) likewise rules leniently. Whether one counts this as a fifth independent doubt or as the halachic gateway that makes applying sfek sfaika to this category possible, the result is the same: the ordinary stringency attached to avodah zarah does not block the combination of doubts here.

Each of these attacks the prohibition at a different logical joint — worshipper, offering, setting, provenance, and halachic category itself. The case is not a sfek sfaika but something considerably stronger.

Even Without the Chazon Ish, the Sheitels Stand

Even if someone wishes to argue that the Chazon Ish's chiddush does not apply to Hinduism, should not be extended to Tirupati, or is open to reconsideration entirely — the sheitels remain permitted. At worst, his position becomes a snif l'hakel joined to the other independent factors above. A snif combined with other grounds is how the Shulchan Aruch and the later poskim construct heterim in cases of shaas ha'dchak, hefsed merubah, and kavod ha'briyos. Snifim are how difficult halachic cases are actually decided.

Even if the Chazon Ish's leg is removed entirely, the remaining legs — the nature-of-the-offering research of Rav Belsky zt"l, the industry reality that much hair is not temple hair at all, the separate-building argument, and the four-or-five-fold sfek sfaika grounded in the Pri Megadim, the Beis Shlomo, and Zevachim 74a — may more than suffice. And the Chazon Ish's position, even when not primary, becomes an additional snif strengthening the others.

Where Stringency Is Appropriate

This is not a blanket permit for every product on the market. Hair extensions are a more significant halachic problem. The company Great Lengths, which produces high-end extensions, manufactures them exclusively from temple hair. That is not a sfek sfaika — it is close to a certainty. Anyone wearing such extensions should consult their rav. At best, extensions sold in ordinary hair salons might be permitted through a double doubt, but the grounds are considerably weaker than for sheitels.

Similarly, sheitels marketed as “ethical” or “temple sourced” should be avoided: the entire heter is built on doubt, and where the seller himself eliminates the doubt, the heter disappears. But the ordinary sheitel carrying a reliable hechsher, from a manufacturer whose supply chain has been investigated, is likely protected by multiple independent halachic arguments, any one of which may likely suffice.

A Final Word on the Tone of the Debate

To those connecting specific tragedies to the wearing of sheitels: b'ahavas Yisroel, please reconsider. Tragedies in Klal Yisroel are not puzzles to be solved by pinning them to one mitzvah or one aveirah. The Gemara in Bava Basra 16a and the sefer Iyov itself warn us away from this kind of accounting. When Chazal tell us to examine our deeds after tragedy, they speak in the first person, not the third.

To those attacking the Chazon Ish zt"l and Rav Dov Landau shlita: attacking gedolei olam is not a small thing. The Chazon Ish is the Chazon Ish. Rav Dov Landau shlita is the rosh yeshiva of Slabodka and a chairman of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah. One may respectfully disagree — great poskim have disagreed throughout the generations — but one does not discard their words lightly.

And to the frum women who have been made to feel that the sheitel on their head is a churban: please know that the heter on which you rely rests not on one foundation but on several. The Chazon Ish, Rav Dov Landau shlita, Rav Belsky zt"l, the Pri Megadim, the Beis Shlomo, the Gemara in Zevachim, the researched reality of the hair industry, and the time-honored principle of sfek sfaika all stand behind you. You are not, b'ezras Hashem, wearing takroves avodah zarah.

This third wave of controversy is only beginning, and the matter will need to be brought again before the gedolei haposkim in America, where most of the

women in question actually live. Until a more airtight system for verifying sources exists, the multiple halachic grounds outlined above remain the basis for the psak.

May Hashem spare us further tragedy, and may we merit to see each other — and each other's mitzvos — with an ayin tovah.

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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 tiyu," 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

Parshas Kedoshim: Speak to the Entire Congregation

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

This shiur is dedicated to the memory of the thousands of brave soldiers of Tzahal and the underground who gave their lives for the creation and protection of Medinat Yisra'el, for the Sanctity of God's Name, the Nation and the Land. May their memories always be a shining inspiration for us as we move from the solemnity of Yom haZikaron to the celebration and Hallel of Yom ha'Atzma'ut.

KOL ADAT B'NEI YISRA'EL

Our Parashah is introduced with the fairly uncommon mention of Kol Adat B'nei Yisra'el – (the entire congregation of the B'nei Yisra'el); there are only two previous times when Mosheh gave commands directly to the whole nation: Regarding the Korban Pesach (Sh'mot 12:3) and regarding the construction of the Mishkan (Sh'mot 35:1,4). In those two cases, the direct participation of every individual is obviously needed: Everyone had to donate to the construction of the Mishkan and everyone had to personally participate in the Korban Pesach. In the case of Parashat Kedoshim, we are faced with an anomaly: A list of laws, not unlike many Mitzvot given earlier, which are to be pronounced in front of the entire congregation. Why was Parashat Kedoshim said b'Hakhel (with the whole congregation assembled)? (see Torat Kohanim [cited in Rashi] at the beginning of our Parashah).

A second question arises from the formulation of the first “command” in our Parashah:

Kedoshim Tihyu, Ki Kadosh Ani Hashem Eloheikhem
“Be holy, for I, Hashem your God, am Holy.”

What is the Torah commanding us here? We are accustomed to Mitzvot which direct us in a specific way – either to action (e.g. eating Matzot, taking a Lulav) or to avoiding an action (e.g. stealing, murder). The command to “be holy” is unspecified and gives us no clue as to how we are to fulfill it.

There are two ways to approach this problem. We could either view the statement as independent – in which case our questions stands and we need to identify the specific parameters and goals of this Mitzvah. Alternatively, we could view this statement as general, either explicated in later verses or itself an additional perspective on earlier verses.

II. KEDOSHIM TIHYU AS AN INDEPENDENT MITZVAH

RAMBAM'S VIEW

Ramban and Rambam, in different ways, understand this Mitzvah to be independent. Rambam, in his fourth introductory paragraph to the Sefer haMitzvot (Shoresh #4), maintains that this statement is not to be reckoned as a Mitzvah (among the reckoning of 613 Mitzvot), since it is general in nature (what the Rambam calls a Mitzvah Kolelet.) Rambam equates the command to “be holy” with commands such as “keep all of My Mitzvot” etc.

RAMBAN'S VIEW

Ramban, in a very different style, assumes an independent stand to this command:

Abstain from the forbidden sexual relationships [mentioned in the preceding section] and from [other] sin, because wherever you find [in the Torah] a warning to guard against immorality, you find the mention of ‘holiness’”. This is Rashi's language.

[note: we can see from Rashi's comments that he does not view Kedoshim Tih'yu as purely independent, rather it underscores the sexual prohibitions presented in the previous chapter. As is clear immediately, Ramban differs on this critical point.]

But in the Torat Kohanim, I have seen it mentioned without any qualification [i.e. without any particular reference to immorality, as Rashi expressed it], saying: “Be self-restraining.” Similarly, the Rabbis taught there: “And you shall sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am Holy. Just as I am Holy, so be you holy. Just as I am Pure, so be you pure.” And in my

opinion, this abstinence does not refer only to restraint from acts of immorality, as the Rabbi [Rashi] wrote, but it is rather the self-control mentioned throughout the Talmud, which confers upon those who practice it the name of P'rushim, [literally: "those who are separated" from self-indulgence, as will be explained, or those who practice self-restraint]. The meaning thereof is as follows: The Torah has admonished us against immorality and forbidden foods, but permitted sexual intercourse between man and his wife, and the eating of [certain] meat and wine. If so, a man of desire could consider this to be a permission to be passionately addicted to sexual intercourse with his wife or many wives, and be among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh, and speak freely all profanities, since this prohibition has not been [expressly] mentioned in the Torah, and thus he will become a Naval biR'shut haTorah (sordid person within the permissible realm of the Torah)! Therefore, after having listed the matters which He prohibited altogether, Scripture followed them up by a general command that we practice moderation even in matters which are permitted, [such as in the following]: One should minimize sexual intercourse, similar to that which the Rabbis have said: "So that the disciples of the Sages should not be found together with their wives as often as the hens," and he should not engage in it except as required in fulfillment of the commandment thereof. He should also sanctify himself [to self-restraint] by using wine in small amounts, just as Scripture calls a Nazirite "holy" [for abstaining from wine and strong drink], and he should remember the evils which the Torah mentioned as following from [drinking wine] in the cases of Noach and Lot. Similarly, he should keep himself away from impurity [in his ordinary daily activity], even though we have not been admonished against it in the Torah. Likewise, he should guard his mouth and tongue from being defiled by excessive food and lewd talk, similar to what Scripture states, and every mouth speaks wantonness, and he should purify himself in this respect until he reaches the degree known as [complete] "self-restraint," as the Rabbis said concerning Rabbi Chiyya, that never in his life did he engage in unnecessary talk. It is with reference to these and similar matters that this general commandment [Kedoshim Tihyu] is concerned, after He had enumerated all individual deeds which are strictly forbidden, so that cleanliness of hands and body, are also included in this precept, just like the Rabbis have said: "And you shall sanctify yourselves : this refers to the washing of hands before meals. And be you holy : this refers to the washing of hands after meals [before the reciting of Birkat haMazon]. For I am Holy – this refers to the spiced oil" [with which they used to rub their hands after a meal.] For although these [washing and perfuming of hands] are commandments of Rabbinic origin, yet Scripture's main intention is to warn us of such matters, that we should be [physically] clean and [ritually] pure, and separated from the common people who soil themselves with luxuries and unseemly things. And such is the way of the Torah, that after it lists certain specific prohibitions, it includes them all in a general precept. Thus after warning with detailed laws regarding all business dealings between people, such as not to steal or rob or to wrong one another, and other similar prohibitions, He said in general: And you shall do that which is right and good: , thus including under a Mitzvat Aseh the duty of doing that which is right and of agreeing to a compromise [when not to do so would be inequitable]; as well as all requirements to act "beyond" the line of justice [i.e. to be generous in not insisting upon one's rights as defined by the strict letter of the law, but to agree to act "beyond" that line of the strict law] for the sake of pleasing one's fellowman, as I will explain when I reach there [that verse], with the will of haKadosh Barukh Hu. Similarly in the case of the Sabbath, He prohibited doing certain classes of work by means of a Mitzvat Lo Ta'aseh, and painstaking labors [not categorized as "work", such as transferring heavy loads in one's yard from one place to another, etc.] He included under a general Mitzvat Aseh, as it is said, but on the seventh day you shall rest. I will yet explain this, with God's help.

III. KEDOSHIM TIHYU AS THE TELOS OF MITZVOT

As noted above, Rashi maintains (unlike Rambam and Ramban) that Kedoshim Tihyu does not stand independently, rather it is a proper summary to the sexual prohibitions listed in the previous chapter (and, perhaps, a "distant introduction" to that same list in the following chapter). There are other Rishonim (notably S'forno) who maintain that Kedoshim Tihyu is the "topic sentence" for most, if not all of the Mitzvot in chapter 19. To wit, Kedoshim Tihyu is a general command – and the Mitzvot which follow direct us to behave in such a fashion as will insure our achieving this lofty status.

For purposes of this shiur, we will adopt this approach and attempt to understand the role of the various Mitzvot given (although, for brevity's sake, we will only discuss those Mitzvot mentioned in the first 19 verses of the chapter) within the scheme of Kedoshim Tihyu. Before going further, I'd like to pose two questions on the wording of verse 2.

Besides our concern as to meaning (what does it mean to be Kadosh?), there is a grammatical sense here that bears inquiry. Many of the Mitzvot given to the B'nei Yisra'el are presented in the grammatically singular form – even though they are given to everyone as individuals. The clearest example of this is the Ten Statements (Sh'mot Ch. 20, D'varim Ch. 5 – see Ramban at the beginning of Sh'mot 20).

Even though these statements were given to the entire people, they were given in the singular (e.g. Zakhor as opposed to Zikhru). Why is the goal-statement of our Parashah, Kedoshim Tihyu, presented in the plural? The second half of the

statement is much more troubling – ...Ki Kadosh Ani Hashem Eloheikhem – “...for I, Hashem your God, am Holy”. The transitional word Ki, usually translated as “because”, seems to make no sense here. The statement is presented as a cause and effect – since God is Holy, the Congregation of Yisra’el should be holy. What is the reasoning here? How does the fact of God’s sanctity imply ours? Another question presents itself once we start looking through the various Mitzvot in this Parashah. At the conclusion of many of the verses, the refrain Ani YHVH or Ani Hashem Eloheikhem is found as a concluding statement. What is the rhyme and reason of this “signature”? (This is a double question – what does it mean, and what is the logic behind its placement at particular junctures.)

Once we look at the Parashah in greater detail, two specific Mitzvot (or groups of Mitzvot) catch our eye as being somewhat incongruous with the theme of the Parashah. In vv. 5-8, after being (reminded) (commanded) regarding fearing our parents, observing Shabbat and avoiding idolatry – areas of Halakhah which we would all agree hold central places in our religious consciousness – the Torah elaborates the law of pigul, of the goodwill offering which is eaten after its due time (Halakhically translated into an offering regarding which the officiant intended it to be eaten later than its due time and had that intent while officiating). This would seem to be a relatively “minor” area of law, one which does not seem to fit the “grand” nature of the call to be holy and the areas of honor for parents, Shabbat observance and avoiding idolatry. What is the role of pigul in this scheme?

One final question: After the crescendo of interpersonal Mitzvot, climaxing in the credo of Jewish ethics: v’Ahavta l’Re’akha Kamokhah – (you shall love your fellow as yourself – v. 18), the Torah follows with a command to keep God’s Hukim, specifically the laws of Kil’ayim (not mixing wool and linen in clothing, not mixing seeds and not cross-breeding animals). This seems like a big “letdown” after the glorious call to fellowship in the previous few verses. What is the logic behind the placement of this command/group of commands?

To summarize our questions:

- 1) Why was this Parashah to be said to the entire congregation?
- 2) Why is this command given in the plural?
- 3) What is the meaning of “Kedoshim Tihyu”?
- 4) What is the logic behind “...for I, Hashem your God, am holy”?
- 5) What is the meaning behind the refrain Ani YHVH?
- 6) What is the role of the law of pigul in our Parashah?
- 7) What is the logic behind the placement of Hukot Kil’ayim?

IV. FROM “GOY KADOSH” TO “KEDOSHIM TIHYU”

When we compare the last time that our entire people was addressed – at the foot of Mount Sinai – with this time, we note a striking similarity:

You shall be unto me a kingdom of Kohanim and a Goy Kadosh (holy nation). (Sh’mot 19:6).

In the same way, this address to the entire people begins with a charge to be holy; but, there’s the rub. As opposed to Goy Kadosh – a directive to the nation as a singular political unit to manifest sanctity – in our case, the charge is directed to each individual – Kedoshim Tihyu. Why the switch?

When we chart the sequence of Mitzvot given to us until this point, we note that they follow a sequence designed to create a just and holy society – but are not, for the most part, addressed to the spiritual growth and sanctity of the individual. We can break the sequence into three sections:

A) Sefer haB’rit (Sh’mot 20-23):

Besides the Ten Statements (see our shiur on that topic, found at <http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/sh/dt.57.2.5.html>),

nearly all of the Mitzvot given in this section are geared to creating and maintaining a just society. From the laws of murder, kidnapping and self-defense to the protection of the downtrodden and avoidance of judicial corruption, the Sefer haB'rit inheres the blueprint for a theistically-focused ethical society. (As implied, there are a few apparent exceptions to this rule; proper treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this shiur.)

B) The Mishkan (Sanctuary – Sh'mot 25-Vayyikra 10):

Once the society is just and safeguarded against corruption and oppression, it is ready to receive the Divine Presence. Keep in mind that the goal of the Mishkan was to enshrine God among the people, not in the tent itself (Sh'mot 25:8). Once the Mishkan was constructed, God commanded us regarding those methods via which the community and the individual might come closer (Korban) to Him. Although, as mentioned, this system was made available to individuals – both as expiation and to support the desire for a closeness to the Divine Presence – it was still within the realm of the communal sanctity of the Mishkan.

C) Tum'ah (Impurity – Vayyikra 11-18):

Interestingly, nearly all of these laws (Forbidden foods and their impact on ritual purity [Ch. 11]; childbirth [Ch. 12]; scale disease and its attendant rituals [Ch. 13 & 14]; sexual emissions [Ch. 15]; purification of the Mishkan from its impurities [Ch. 16]; prohibitions relating to “outside” slaughtering [Ch. 17]; prohibitions relating to sexual relations [Ch. 18]) are addressed to the individual. (The one exception is Ch. 16, the purification of the Mishkan.)

The reason for this can be explained by way of an analogy from the world of group dynamics. For example, when a group is singing together (e.g. at a Shabbaton), the entire group is considered to be singing, not one individual. To the extent that an individual is leading the group or deciding on the next song, he or she is doing so as a representative of the group, not as an individual. On the other hand, if even one person disrupts the singing (by talking, laughing, trying to sing something else etc.), that can totally defeat the group effort. In other words – a group effort is supported by the group but can be destroyed by one individual.

In much the same way, we credit the manifestation of God's Presence among the people to the group; nevertheless, one individual can destroy that experience and drive the Shekhinah away through one of the various behaviors which bring Tum'ah into the realm of the Divine. The third section – of Tum'ah – is indeed addressed to the individual, because he or she has the ability to destroy the national enterprise of Kedushah.

In any case, [nearly] all of the Mitzvot given to us until this point are geared to creating, enhancing and maintaining the national Kedushah as reflected by God's Presence among the people.

As we move into our Parashah, we note a clear shift in emphasis – the Torah is now addressing the individual and demanding a “higher” level of spirituality. It is no longer enough to be a member of a Goy Kadosh and not to disrupt that Kedushah; each individual is now called to his own spiritual growth – to finally achieve the ultimate in human heroism, which was the original Divine mandate for humanity:

And God said: Let us make Man in Our Image... and God created Man in His Image, in the Image of God He created him... (B'resheet 1:26-27).

Why then is this Divine charge given in the plural – Kedoshim Tih'yu – if it is addressed to the individual? The answer lies in understanding the basic tension of Jewish values. Unlike some Eastern worship-systems, we do not maintain that individual spiritual perfection is the sole goal of our existence. We live in this world and have practical obligations towards it. On the other, we do not maintain that we should negate our personae to the communal will and effort, ignoring our own talents, desires and ambitions.

As such, the enterprise of individual Kedushah can not be taken out of the realm of the community – and we must be addressed to grow as individuals within the context of interpersonal relationships as well as internally. Therefore, the Torah addresses us as an entire nation – but, instead of a Holy Nation, we are now called to add “Nation of Holy Individuals” to our title.

V. VERSE 2 REVISITED

We can now answer our first two questions:

- 1) This Parashah to be said to the entire congregation because, unlike earlier Parashiot which were addressed to the national project of Kedushah – and thus could be communicated to the leaders first – this Parashah is addressed to the personal Kedushah-growth of each individual.
- 2) The command was given in the plural because it was addressed to the individuals as they behave both personally and socially.

KI KADOSH ANI

We can now also answer the next two questions:

- 3) Kedoshim Tih'yu means that we should finally realize and actualize the Tzelem Elokim (Image of God) in which we were all created. Doing so means imitating God (within the limits imposed by both the laws of physics [i.e. science] and the laws of morality [i.e. the Torah]).
- 4) This also explains the logic behind “for I, Hashem your God, am holy”; since we were created in His Image (whatever that may mean; that is a shiur in and of itself), we are now called to reflect that Image through our own behavior. [Alternatively, we could read the Ki as an extended Kaf haDim'yon (the letter Kaf as a prefix indicates similarity) – i.e. “be holy LIKE I, Hashem your God, am Holy.”]

VI. THE “ANI YHVH” REFRAIN

In order to understand the constant refrain of Ani YHVH in our Parashah (note that it continues – more sporadically – through Ch. 22), we'll deviate for a moment to investigate the central text of Hallel: Hodu lHashem Ki Tov, Ki l'Olam Has'do (“give thanks to YHVH, for He is good, for His kindness endures forever” – T'hilim 118:1).

The second verse in that chapter is Yomar Na Yisra'el, Ki l'Olam Has'do – lit. “let Yisra'el say: for His kindness endures forever”. This sentence is a bit awkward, as the Ki (“...for...”) at the beginning of the second half of this verse seems to point nowhere; an idea cannot begin with the introduction of an effect, it must be preceded by a cause (e.g. “He is good”). In addition, our custom of responding to the leader is not to echo his line (Yomar Na...), rather to repeat the first line. Why do we do this? [These two questions are equally germane in reference to the next two verses.]

I would like to suggest that the second verse should be understood as follows: Yomar Na Yisra'el [Hodu lHashem Ki Tov] Ki l'Olam Has'do.

In other words, the Psalmist is asking Yisra'el (and the House of Aharon and the God-fearers) to join in his praise which begins with Hodu.... Why then does the verse abbreviate this phrase? It is simply too long! Keep in mind that many of the T'hilim were composed to be recited by the Levi'im in antiphonal fashion in the Beit haMikdash – and, as such, meter was a significant consideration. The verse includes an ellipsis: Yomar Na Yisra'el: “...Ki l'Olam Has'do” – which explains our response and the awkward grammar.

The same approach can be utilized to explain the refrain of Ani Hashem [Eloheikhem] in our Parashah. The topic sentence of our Parashah is “Be holy, for I, Hashem your God, am Holy”. The signature form Ani YHVH is an elliptical way of repeating the entire charge to God-like Kedushah. As an example, instead of reading Ish Imo v'Aviv Tira'u v'et Shab'totai Tish'moru, Ani Hashem Eloheikhem (Each man shall fear his mother and father; observe My Shabbatot, I am Hashem your God) (v. 3), read Ish Imo v'Aviv Tira'u v'et Shab'totai Tish'moru, [Kedoshim Tih'yu, Ki Kadosh] Ani Hashem Eloheikhem (Each man shall fear his mother and father; observe My Shabbatot, [be holy, for] I Hashem your God [am Holy]).

- 5) This answers our fifth question – the refrain of Ani YHVH is an abbreviated form of the topic sentence, marking each occurrence of this refrain as a demarcation of another dimension of Kedoshim Tih'yu. We can almost view the components of our Parashah as a list, each item concluding with a short form of the sentence which guides the entire section.

We can now examine the first several stages of our Parashah to better understand the call to individual Kedushah.

VII. FEARING PARENTS AND OBSERVING SHABBAT

Each man shall fear his parents, observe My Shabbatot, I am Hashem your God (v. 3)

Why are these two juxtaposed? In addition, the grammar of the first stich is uneven: It is first phrased in the singular (Ish Imo v'Aviv -"each man, his mother and father...") but ends in the plural (Tira'u - "you [plural] shall fear").

Rashi is sensitive to the first problem – and his answer will help us with the second. "Observe My Shabbatot": The text juxtaposed Sh'mirat Shabbat to fear of your father, to teach you that although I have warned you concerning fear of your father, if he tells you to desecrate Shabbat, do not heed him..."I am Hashem your God": you and your father are obligated to honor Me, therefore, do not heed him to violate My words."

This also explains the grammatical shift: God [through Mosheh] is addressing the entire nation, made up of many multi-generational families. Even though He is speaking to each individual son and daughter, even those parents have their own parents to respect and fear. That entire group has a greater mission and loyalty to keep in mind – we are all bound to God's commands.

The import of this balance is to keep any particular object of our honor or fear from becoming an end in and of itself – and keeps us from creating an obsession around it. Even though we are commanded to fear our parents, that fear should not become so overwhelming that it keeps us from heeding God's commands.

This is, indeed, a reflection of God's Sanctity – the goal of the whole enterprise. Although we often associate sanctity with isolation (a Nazirite is considered Kadosh – see Bamidbar 6:5), God's Holiness is one of synthesis and balance. On the one hand, God is transcendent; yet God is also immanent. This same balance is the (very challenging) goal of Kedoshim Tih'yu. The balance between fear of parents and loyalty to God's commands is one dimension of this imitation of the Divine.

VIII. DO NOT TURN TO THE FALSE GODS

The next verse uses a new verb in its repetition of the warning against idolatry. Al Tiph'nu – "Do not turn away to the false gods...". The Torah uses this verb to again stress the need for balance; one of the prevalent features of pagan worship is fetishism, such that the entire focus of the individual is geared to this worship-object. Although the Torah abhors idolatry for its demeaning of the worshipper and the inherent silliness of the notion (see MT Avodah Zarah 11:16), it may also be warning us away from fetishism and obsessive behavior.

[Note that nearly all Mitzvot have maximum limits; perhaps this is a way of assuring that no Mitzvah would be turned into an end in and of itself].

IX. PIGUL

Armed with our understanding of Ani YHVH as a "marker", we can now explain the role of pigul here. Note that the refrain does not show up again until the end of v. 10 – so pigul is included in one "Kedoshim- Tih'yu dimension" with the laws of Pe'ah, Leket, Peret and 'Olelot (various gleanings left for the poor during harvest). Shadal (Sh'mu'el David Luzzato, 19th century Italian commentator) suggests that the reasoning behind the law of pigul is akin to the gleanings. If the Torah had allowed a goodwill offering (Korban Sh'lamim) to be eaten over an indefinite time period, the individual would likely eat some, with his family and close friends, during the first few days after bringing it. He would then store it away and continue to "celebrate" with his entourage. Keep in mind that a Sh'lamim is brought from the flock or the herd – a large animal which cannot be devoured quickly. Since the Torah commands that a Sh'lamim must be eaten on the day that it is offered and the morrow – no later than the end of that second night, the one bringing the offering will perforce share it with many others. The assumption is that not only will this offering have a portion for God (burnt on the altar), a portion for the Kohanim (see Vayyikra 7:34) and a portion for the Yisra'el who brought it (see Rashi on Vayyikra 3:1) – it will also include the poor, since the one who brought it will have to share it around to make sure it is devoured on time.

This understanding of Pigul underscores another dimension of the balance and synthesis which is the desired type of Kedushah. Not only must both the "secular" and "holy" parts of our lives be informed by a desire to holiness – but those considerations must inform each other. Not only do we have to act compassionately and generously with the poor in our midst – we have to make that consideration a part and parcel of our Mikdash-experience.

This answers our sixth question – pigul is an integral piece of the Kedushah experience, as it ensures that we not “lose ourselves” in the sanctity of the Mikdash and forget our communal responsibilities.

X. VERSES 11-18: THE ETHICAL SOCIETY

As I mentioned in the shorter shiur sent out last week, these four groups of Mitzvot are geared towards elevating a society to the pinnacle of interpersonal sensitivity and empathy:

We start with the society which is rife with stealing – such that a person’s word, even in court, is not to be trusted, where even God’s Name is desecrated in the name of material gain. This is the society of “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is mine” (Avot 5:10) – and verses 11 & 12 address this level of corruption and command us to move up from here.

Then – the society in which more subtle types of corruption exist – holding back pay, hurting people who won’t find out that it’s you – or won’t even know about it. This is the society of “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is yours” – without respect for boundaries. To this society, the Torah addresses verses 13 & 14.

We then look at a society which has moved up from these levels – but where there is still discrimination and favoritism in the system – and where idle gossip and “turning a blind eye” are the norm. “What’s yours is yours and what’s mine is mine” – i.e. mind your own business. To this society, the Torah addresses verses 15 & 16.

And then we move to build the ideal society: Once we have justice, revenge seems reasonable. And there seems to be no need for my letting you know that your behavior upsets me – or to be as concerned with your needs as I am with mine. We move from the just society to the holy society. All of the Mitzvot in these last two verses take us beyond justice – they move us towards compassion. Towards “What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is yours”.

XI. HUKOT KIL’AYIM

Now, to our final question: Why does the Torah mention the prohibitions of cross-breeding, cross-planting and “woolsylinsy” immediately after the glorious crescendo of “Love your fellow as yourself”? These three prohibitions are introduced with the phrase Et Hukotai Tish’moru – “Keep my Hukot”. Although conventional wisdom holds that a Hok is a “non-rational” law (see Rashi at the beginning of Parashat Hukat, 19:2), the simple meaning of the word is “immutable law”. See, for instance, Yirmiyahu 33:25, where he refers to the Hukot of heaven and earth. In Hebrew, the laws of physics are called Hukim, whereas rules of grammar are called Mishpatim. When the Torah says that we must observe God’s Hukot, it means that we have to uphold and support the laws which God etched into the universe. Why is this the case – and how can we do so?

Keep in mind that our original mandate was to be “in God’s Image” and to have dominion over the earth. If we look at the description of creation in the first chapter of B’resheet, we notice that there is a stress on order and closed cycles of reproduction and regeneration. The day ends here, the night begins here; the heavenly waters and earthly waters are separated; the land ends here and the water begins here; each tree and plant regenerates l’Mineihu (according to its own kind) and so on.

Since we are charged with being God’s “caretakers” of the earth, it follows that we must not only continue the process of creation and order (note that our Rabbis say that a judge who renders perfect judgment is considered a partner with God in creation), but we must also not attempt to subvert that order.

Ramban (Vayyikra 19:19) provides two reasons for this limitation. If we attempt to usurp God’s order, the implication is that God’s creation is insufficient and somehow imperfect. In addition, he notes, many forms of usurpation of the natural order impair the reproductive ability of that species (witness the mule).

After having guided us to the perfectly ethical and compassionate society, the Torah addresses the next concern. Since we have (we think) achieved Kedoshim Tih’yu, and fully reflect God’s sanctity, we may parlay that relationship into a full partnership and deign to improve upon His design. The lesson of Hukot Kil’ayim is the limited nature of our partnership – we may endeavor to actualize our Godly Image, but we must never forget that it is a limited partnership. The parallel of Kedoshim Tih’yu with Kadosh Ani must never lead us to arrogantly forgetting our role in God’s world. This lofty goal is only achieved when we not only maintain balance – but also perspective.

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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 understood 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 shoshet - 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

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 we 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.