

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“You must surely instruct your colleague, so that you do not bear his sin" (Leviticus 19:17).

In order for an individual to be considered guilty of transgression, it is necessary that he be warned - or chastised - in advance of his crime, in order to ascertain that he is committing the forbidden deed willfully and with full understanding of the seriousness of his transgression. One of the greatest religio - legal decisors of the last generation, Rav Abraham Isaish Karelitz (Known as the Hazon Ish), seriously ruled that the Jewish community dare not condemn and ostracize disbelievers or heretics any longer because there are no longer Jewish religious models capable of properly chastising them. His proof - text is a famous diction of Rabbi Tarfon, who declared two millennia ago: " I would marvel at meeting someone who can properly chastise. The moment one individual says to another, 'Remove the flint between your teeth', the other will respond, 'you first must remove the beam between your eyes'" (B.T. Arakhin 16b)

Especially in our post-modern society, where almost anything goes and every possible moral or immoral position may be justified and rationalized by the subjective perspective of the individual who espouses it, it becomes increasingly difficult for a religious leader to act as a moral censor, chastising specific people for improper conduct. Indeed, is there any way at all in which one can move the transgressor to see the evil in his action?

I would like to recount two incidents which reflect two different (but complementary) methods of "chastisement" for our generation, and may the reader decide as to their effectiveness. The first is based on the Mussar (Ethicist) Navardok Academy, founded by one of the most outstanding disciples of Rav Yisroel Salanter, Rav Yosef Yaish. One of the principles of this higher academy of Jewish learning - which emphasized individual training in character development and had 180 Yeshivot throughout Europe before the Nazis destroyed all but one - was "hatava bimkon hakpada," respect rather than resentment, repay insult with heightened consideration. The idea was that if an individual did me a bad turn, the most effective way for him to realize the evil of his deed would be by my behaving towards him with special accord and

sensitivity. Hopefully, the contrast would make him realize the folly of his actions.

Rav Nekritz, a great sage and devotee of the Navardak School of ethical training, married off a grand-daughter. Many of the Torah sages - Rabbis, Grand-Rabbis and Roshie Yeshiva - were present, many more worthy scholars than there were blessings and honors to dispense under the nuptial canopy during the ceremony. Everyone of the assembled was greatly surprised when an unknown rabbi was given the single honor of intoning the last of the seven nuptial blessings, known as Brakha Aharita. It was assumed that this relatively unknown Rabbi must have had some special influence on the bride and groom - but, truth to tell, they had not laid eyes upon him before their wedding ceremony and hadn't the faintest idea who he was. Rav Nekritz was frequently asked that evening who his special guest was, but he responded only with a silent and knowing smile. It was only after the Rav had passed away, and during the week of mourning in his honor, when his grand-daughter herself (who had been the bride) asked her grandmother about the strange guests identity, that the secret was revealed.

Several years before, Rav and Rebezin Nekritz were invited to a wedding of the daughter of a Rabbi they didn't really know. He kept calling and pressing them, so they agreed to attend. They assumed he would arrange transportation, but when he did not - they traveled by bus and train to the catering hall. They were seated with people they didn't know, Rav Nekritz was not given an honor during the ceremony, and no arrangements were made to take them home. When Rav Nekritz grand-daughter was married, he invited that same Rabbi - and honored him with the final blessing. hatava bimkom hakpada - Repay insult with respect.

A well known friend of mine, grand-son of a sainted zaddik of Jerusalem, who is a learned and charismatic educator, was a year in advance invited to speak at the Graduation Ceremonies of a High School in Israel. A short while before the graduation, he was hospitalized with a difficult bout of pneumonia. He returned home greatly weakened - and the evening of the graduation was cold, windy and rainy. His wife called the assistant Principal asking that her husband be excused due to illness. "It would be a desecration of G-d's name if he doesn't show up. He must come, even if he has to crawl on all four to get here," She said, not even offering to send (or pay for) a taxi. My friend insisted on going - despite his wife's remonstrances that

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he rest at home - and he set out by bus. The entire trip he thought to himself, "How would my grand father have taught this assistant Principal that she had reacted insensitively? My grand-father would have attempted to provide her with an ideal model of proper conduct."

When my friend rose to speak, he said he had to give a brief introduction. He wanted to give a special thanks to the assistant Principal, who had arranged for him to speak. He said that when she heard he had been ill with pneumonia, she called to graciously suggest that perhaps in light of the inclement weather he ought stay at home. When he said that he felt he had to come under any ambition, she offered to send a taxi. He felt it only proper to thank her for her sensitivity and consideration before giving his commencement address. The audience gave the assistant Principal a standing ovation. She called my friend the next day to apologize and to thank him for having taught her a most important lesson. © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha of Kedoshim deals with a myriad of topics, all of which bear relevance to the central topic of the parsha - kedoshim tihyu - "you shall be holy and sanctified, dedicated to God's service." The parsha deals with intimate matters, marriage, home and family. It deals with monetary matters, commerce and business. It deals with interpersonal behavior and challenges, with getting along with others and not taking advantage of the "blindness," handicaps and mistakes of others. It deals with purely ritual matters, with laws of sacrifices and tithes and offerings in the Temple. It is one of the most all-encompassing parshiyot of the entire Torah, leaving almost no area of human experience and Torah ritual observance untouched. So, at first glance, it looks like a hodge-podge of different

rules all thrown together, formless and disorganized, unconnected and even unfocused. But that is far from being the truth of the matter. For the Torah here emphasizes the essential wholeness and unity of the Jewish concept of the service of God and of human dedication and holiness.

The home, the marketplace, the Temple, the dinner table and the kitchen are all the places of holiness. One who restricts "holiness" to specified places of holiness alone, does the Jewish concept of holiness a great disservice. The synagogue and the house of Torah study are special places of holiness but they are not the only exclusive places. Holiness exists wherever Jews apply the holy practices of the Torah in their everyday lives. It is never limited by space, time or circumstance.

This fundamental lesson that emphasizes the omnipresence and universality of the Jewish concept of holiness needs to be repeatedly emphasized in our personal and national lives. One of the great goals of both the Chasidic and Mussar movements, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, was to spread the idea of Torah holiness into every aspect of human life and behavior. In Judaism, it is unthinkable to be a pious person in the synagogue or study hall and a reprehensible person in commercial or interpersonal relationships. I believe that this tawdry situation is included in the famous statement of the Ramban in his commentary to the parsha of Kedoshim that one can be an "obscene person within the confines of Torah." Anyone who limits Torah holiness to matters of ritual, to the places of the synagogue and the study hall exclusively, enters that obscene, treacherous realm.

The Torah does not grant us the luxury of compartmentalizing our lives and our striving for holiness. If schizophrenia is a mental and emotional disease in psychiatric terms, then this is the spiritual version of that same type of disease. The Haskala in the nineteenth century proclaimed that it could produce someone who would be a "Jew in his home and a cosmopolitan human being, a citizen of the world in the marketplace." The events of the past century have proven that this schizophrenic dream is untenable. Only the whole, holy Jew, who practices holiness everywhere in life and in society can aspire to fulfill the Godly challenge of kedoshim tihyu - "you shall be sanctified and dedicated unto God's service." © 2005 *Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your G-d, am holy" (Vayikra 19:2). At first glance, it might seem as if "being holy" is part of our obligation

to emulate G-d. Otherwise, why mention G-d being holy at all - just tell us that we should be holy! If, however, it is precisely because G-d is holy that we must be holy as well - as we must strive to be as G-d-like as possible - we can understand why G-d being holy is included in this commandment.

The Maharal, in his first chapter of *Nesiv Gemilas Chasadim*, makes it very clear that the only aspect of G-d that is even relevant for us to try to emulate is His kindness to others. Therefore, the commandment to "follow in His ways" (Devarim 10:12, 26:17 and 28:9) cannot include "being holy just as He is holy." Although this approach is not universal (see the Chinuch's mitzvah #611, where other aspects - including being holy - are included in the requirement to emulate G-d), the Maharal's approach precludes this being the only possible explanation for including G-d's holiness in our commandment to be holy.

Another possibility is that since we are His people, our (collectively) being holy - or failing to be so - reflects on Him. Therefore, at this public gathering of the entire nation, G-d told them to be a "holy nation" (see Shemos 19:6 and Devarim 26:19), as it will affect the perception of His holiness. This fits in very well with Rashi's approach to holiness being layers of protection added to avoid inappropriate behavior, as such rules followed by the community (i.e. separate seating) will help ensure that the community remains "holy." However, the Ramban's explanation that "holiness" refers to limiting even those things that are permitted would seem to be speaking to the individual - not the nation as a whole. Besides, the Torah uses a similar expression ("being holy because G-d is holy") regarding the requirement to keep kosher (Vayikra 11:49 and 20:26), commandments not taught at a public gathering, and directed at each individual.

So when G-d begins His public lecture that embodies the bulk of His commandments (see Rashi on 19:2), why did He begin by telling us to "be holy because He is holy?" Keeping the commandments properly is not an easy thing to do. Not just because they encompass every aspect of our lives, but because the details of each one can be very complicated, requiring much study in order to follow them to their fullest. Although very often the process of learning these details helps add meaning to the actions, sometimes trying to grasp everything can be overwhelming. There is a danger, when focusing on the structure of the mitzvah (and especially when having to defend that structure from others who may demean it, inadvertently or otherwise), of losing sight of their real purpose- to bring us closer to G-d. We spend much time and effort building the candle, yet can forget to maintain the flame.

Therefore, G-d may have begun by reminding us that the overall goal of the mitzvos is to be holy, to be able to get closer to Him. And because He is holy, we cannot get close to Him if we are obsessed with

material things; even those things that are halachically permitted. Being holy is a prerequisite to getting close to Him - because He is holy.

This is not the same as emulating Him, even if this is being accomplished at the same time. We may try to become holy in order to be more similar to Him, to follow in His ways. But we also must strive to become more holy because it is necessary for the continual growth of our relationship with Him. If we want to create a closer connection to Him, we must become holy - for He is holy. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Yossi Ives, Richmond Synagogue

Consider the opening verses of this Week's Sidra, "Speak to all the congregation of the Children of Israel and tell them: you shall be holy for I the L-d your G-d am holy."

Right, that makes a lot of sense-I have to be holy because Almighty G-d is so, as if there is any comparison. If anything, the logic is reversed. If G-d is holy, surely there is no chance of us attaining holiness. How would you react to Kelly Holmes declaring: "You shall all be double gold Olympic medallists, for I, Kelly Holmes, am a double gold Olympic medallist"? Let's get real, not everyone is a Kelly Holmes. Well, no one is like G-d.

The answer lies in a critical misunderstanding as to what the word 'holy' means. It is commonly misconstrued as living a monastic life or meditating in a remote part of the Himalayas. In Judaism the term 'holy' has a different connotation. Holiness, explains Maimonides, means making daily choices on the basis of a higher purpose. Nachmanides says that it's about being a refined temperate human being. The Baal Sham Tov declared that it means imparting spirituality into our physical reality. The Chatam Sofer says it plainly:

"You shall be holy, but not removed from the world."

Holiness, then, is not about escaping reality-it is about enhancing reality. It is not about rejecting the world, but about elevating it. The etymological root of the word *Kadosh* (holy) means 'separated'. However, it does not mean separated from but separated to-dedicated and committed to a spiritual existence (Ohr Hachaim).

But the question remains: how? How can we transform the mundane into the holy? What would enable us to make our world a G-dly place? The answer lies in our verse: You want to know how? Because I the L-d your G-d in holy. I am you personal G-d, not some remote and detached entity. I permeate your world. You now go and reveal my innate presence that pervades everything. This is done by fulfilling the verse, "In all you ways know Him." In your every action, let G-d's

presence shine through. Maimonides gushingly declared that the Mishnaic aphorism "All your actions should be for the sake of Heaven" are inspired words, for these words encapsulate what holiness means in Judaism: how you behave.

That is why, says the Midrash, the verse begins "Speak to all the congregation of the Children of Israel"-to teach us that holiness is within reach of everyone. G-d is everywhere and in everything, so opportunities to find holiness are everpresent. We are in control of our thoughts, words and actions. It is our choice as to whether we use them to a refined and G-dly end. In that way we become holy.

The Long Journey to Freedom

by Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks

What is the meaning of sefirat haomer, the counting of the 49 days between (the second day of) Pesach and Shevuot? Nahmanides offers a fascinating speculation-deeply relevant to the global politics of today.

The forty nine days are, he argues, a form of chol hamoed-the intermediate days of the festival. Just as on Sukkot we have a festival of seven days followed by a Yom Tov, Shemini Atseret, so on Pesach we have a festival of seven weeks followed by a Yom Tov, Shavuot. Indeed the Rabbinical name for Shavuot was Atzeret, meaning, 'end, closure, completion'.

Pesach and Shavuot form a single continuous sequence, as do Sukkot and Shmini Atseret. Sefirat haomer joins the two to show that they are connected, not separate events. Pesach and Shavuot are the beginning and end of a single journey-the journey from one kind of freedom to another.

Isaiah Berlin noted the difference between two types of freedom: negative (freedom from) and positive (freedom to). Negative freedom is what a slave experiences when he or she is liberated. They are free from being subject to someone else's will. That is a great release, but it is individual liberty, not collective freedom.

A society in which everyone was free to do what they liked would be one in which the strong were free to dominate the weak and the rich to exploit the poor. That is not a free society, nor a just one. Had the Israelites known only that kind of freedom, they would have built a replica of Egypt, a society of rulers and ruled. Essential to the Torah's view of a free society is that it is not one in which my freedom can be bought at the cost of yours.

There is only one antidote: the rule of law. For it is law that ensures that powerful and powerless are treated alike-that each has access to justice; each can have his or her complaints heard; each has equal dignity as a member of society. That is why Pesach was only the beginning of the journey. That was when the Israelites acquired negative liberty. They were no longer Pharaoh's slaves.

It was only on Shavuot that the journey was complete, for that was when they received the Torah, the law which grants us equal dignity as citizens under the sovereignty of G-d.

Freedom involves responsibility-that is the revolutionary proposition at the heart of the Torah. You do not create a free society simply by removing a tyrant. That is only the first step. The second comes when the members of that society exercise selfrestraint, respecting the rule of law and impartial justice. We count the Omer to remind us that freedom is not won overnight. It involves a long journey-from winning my freedom to honouring yours. © 2005 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This weeks portion includes the famous dictum, love they neighbor as thyself-ve-ahavta le-reiakha kamokha. (Leviticus 19:18) What is the secret to love?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler in his Mikhtav M'Eliyahu (Strive for Truth), points out that the cornerstone of love is the capacity to give to one's beloved. And he adds, it's not necessarily the case that one first loves and from the loving comes the giving. The reverse is equally true, and even more powerful. One gives and from the giving, comes loving. The more one gives, the more one loves.

Years ago, there was an extraordinarily successful program known as Marriage Encounter. One of its basic teachings was that love is not a feeling, it's a decision. After all, feelings change. One morning I may wake up feeling like loving my spouse, child, parent, siblings or friends, and the next morning, I may not. But if I've decided to love you-that is, if love is a decision-from the decision, from the action, the feeling may come. In fact, the real test of love is not only what I feel towards you, but what I'm prepared to do for you.

The idea that love is predicated on action, is crucial to understanding prayer, and for that matter all of Jewish ritual. If prayer is an expression of one's love of God, why should we be mandated to pray? Why not pray only when we feel like it?

It is often the case, however, that we may not feel like praying for long periods of time. But if we're obligated to pray, if we make a decision to pray, by placing ourselves in a prayerful mode, feelings of prayer may surface. This in fact is the basic idea of ritual, religious observance, which connects us to God. Perform the ritual and from the act the feeling may come. Hence, Jews at Sinai first proclaimed "we will do," only afterwards did they say "we will listen." (Exodus 24:7)

What is true in personal relationships in regard to love of others and of God is also true about our love for the community. Ahavat Yisrael is not only the

emotion of loving other Jews, but is translating that love into action, into actually doing something for Am Yisrael.

From this perspective, I have more respect for someone who disagrees with me and therefore, doesn't act, than for someone who agrees but for a variety of reasons, doesn't act. Indifference is a greater sin than taking the wrong position.

No wonder the root of ahavah, love, is the two letter Aramaic word hav, to give- giving is the pathway to love. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Chapter 19 of Vayikra, in this week's Torah portion, includes a long list of mitzvot, with the general heading, "You shall be holy" [19:2]. One important point about this list is that the final verses (19:30-37) serve as a summary of the main themes earlier in the chapter. For example, the verse "Observe my Shabbat" [19:30] is a repeat of the command given in 19:3. In addition, the verse, "Do not turn to the 'ov' and the 'yidoni,' do not attempt to become contaminated with them, I am your G-d" [19:31], is similar to the earlier verse, "Do not turn to idols, and do not make idolatrous masks for you, I am your G-d" [19:4]. Why is this summary necessary?

Evidently, the summary is not simply a repetition but rather an extension of the mitzvot that appeared in the main list. Let us begin with one of the examples given above: In 19:4, it is explicitly forbidden to turn towards idols, but the later verse, 19:31, adds specific new elements of sorcery. Similar considerations apply to the two verses, "Do not curse a deaf person, and do not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person, and you shall fear your G-d, I am G-d" [19:14], and what appears in the summary, "Rise up before an elderly person, and give honor to an old person, and you shall fear your G-d, I am G-d" [19:32]. The two verses are linked not only by the repeated phrase with which they end, a phrase which appears only in those verses, but also by their contents. Once again, the effect is the same as described above: In the first verse we are commanded not to cause harm to weak people, while the second verse contains a command to show respect for elderly people.

Another example of this approach appears further on. In the summary, we are taught, "If a stranger lives with you in your land, do not upset him. The stranger who lives among you should be like a citizen among you, and you shall love him like yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt, and I am your G-d." [19:33-34]. This can be compared to, "Do not hate your brother in your heart, rebuke your colleague and do not bear any sin because of him. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against people of your nation, and you shall love your colleague as yourself, I am G-d." [19:17-18]. While

the first command refers only to "a brother," the second one expands this to include love for a stranger and the proper attitude towards him.

The list of mitzvot ends with, "Do not perform any injustice in a trial, with respect to measurements, weights, and liquid measures" [19:35]. This can be compared to a verse in the main group of mitzvot, "Do not perform any injustice in a trial, do not raise up a poor man and do not give honor to a great man, judge your colleague righteously" [19:15]. Once again, the command has been extended, from doing injustice in the framework of a court of law to a prohibition relevant to every man in his day-to-day business dealings.

Evidently, this two-stage technique has two objectives. First, it shows the desired trend, continuously striving for refinement in the observation of the mitzvot, keeping in mind that there are different levels of fulfillment possible. In addition, by this device the Torah teaches the proper sequence in observing the mitzvot: First one should determine the basic principles, and these should then serve as the basis for adding the pertinent details later on.

"Komemiut"-Standing Upright

by Brigadier General Rabbi Yisrael Weiss, Chief Rabbi of the IDF

We are on the right path! Even if it is long and difficult, if we stay on the path with confidence and faith, sure that there is no other possible way, we will eventually reach the final objective.

It is true that there are ups and downs, there are many questions, and we sometimes feel that we are moving backwards, as in the verse, "G-d did not guide them on the route of the Pelishtim, which was close" [Shemot 13:17]. In spite of this, we continue to believe with every fiber of our being that the end is near, and that very soon the salvation will appear and our faith will be shown to have been justified. Even at the times that we are forced to "bow down to our knees," we do this standing upright!

The path to the source of light is totally dependent on the dedication that each and every person is willing to show, and on his or her willingness to implement all of the consequences of his or her faith. In the commentary on the Siddur by the Rokeach, it is noted that in "Zichronot" of Yom Kippur, there are 116 words from the beginning of the prayer, "Our G-d..." until the blessing, "He who remembers the covenant" (page 673). The same number of words appears in the Torah story about the binding of Yitzchak, from "Avraham took the wood for the Olah" [Bereishit 22:6] until "you did not withhold your only son from me" [22:12]. The same number of words appears at the start of the Torah portion of Bechukotai, starting with "If you observe my laws" [Vayikra 26:2] until "I will lead you stage by stage-komemiut" [26:13]. This implies that we are required to be totally dedicated to the objective of

establishing our nation. If we do this, the Almighty will without a doubt fulfill His obligation.

G-d's promise, "I will lead you stage by stage" [26:13], includes several levels, each one higher than the preceding one. According to Rashi, quoted in the title of this article, the verse tells us to stand upright. The Rashbam notes that when his yoke is removed, a man can hold his head straight. The next highest level is that the people "will not be afraid of any other creature" [Sifra Bechukotai 1:3]. Above this, "There will be no pain, G-d will remove any sickness from you and put it on your enemies" [Or Zarua 37]. The highest level is one of joy: "And those redeemed by G-d will return, and they will come to Zion with happiness and an eternal joy on their heads" [Yeshayahu 35:10]. RADAK notes, "This is a parable, meaning they will walk with their heads high, in happiness."

"Some sages have written that in Eretz Yisrael one should say, 'guide us stage by stage IN our land, and not TO our land,'" [Talmudic Encyclopedia, "Kriyat Shema"]. Within the land, we are involved at two levels at the same time: intellectual and physical, external and internal. It is necessary to combine body and soul in order to completely form Jewish pride, both nationalistic and linked to the land. And this does not contradict the obligation of mankind to maintain true modesty.

"All through the years, we beg of the Master of the World, 'break the yoke from around our necks and bring us stage by stage to our land,'" Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook wrote (a psalm to the State of Israel). This year we must expand this request with even greater meaning. "G-d will give power to His nation, G-d will bless His people with peace" [Tehillim 29:11].

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah presents the Jewish nation in a most unique context. In his last words of prophecy the prophet Amos describes the Jewish people in a very peculiar manner. He says in the name of Hashem, "Aren't you likened to the Kushites, to be Mine?" (9:7) Who are Kushites and in what way are the Jewish people compared to them? Chazal in the Yalkut Shimoni (157) interpret the term Kushites to refer to the Ethiopian community whose skin color is distinctly different than all other nations. This physical distinction renders it virtually impossible for the Kushites to intermingle with anyone without maintaining their national identity. Chazal continue that in this same manner the Jewish people are distinctly different than all other nations. The moral and ethical code of the observant Jewish people inhibits them from intermingling with the nations of the world. The drastic skin color contrast of the Ethiopians serves as a striking analogy to the drastic ethical contrast between the Jewish people and all other nations.

The prophet continues and reminds the Jewish people that it is this distinct ethical conduct which renders them Hashem's chosen people. After likening the Jewish people to the Kushites, the prophet completes his analogy with the profound words, "to be Mine". The Metzudos Dovid (9:7) explains this to mean that we are Hashem's people exclusively because of our distinguished ethical conduct. He adds that we will remain Hashem's special nation as long as we possess elevated ethical standards. The prophet then draws our attention to our earliest origins and says, "Didn't Hashem bring you up from the land of Egypt?" (ad loc.) Malbim explains that these words allude to the distinguished qualities of the Jewish people in whose merit they were liberated from Egypt. Although they existed for two hundred years in the corrupt and immoral Egyptian environment they remained a distinct and distinguished entity. Their moral code of dress and speech reflected their pure attitudes about life which made intermingling with the Egyptians a virtual impossibility. For the most part, their Jewish values were not corrupted or distorted which allowed the Jews to remain distinguished and elevated.

The prophet concludes our haftorah with this theme and promises our ultimate redemption from our extended exile. Amos says, "On that day I will establish the kingdom of Dovid.... so that you, upon whom My name rests, will inherit Edom and all nations." (9:11,12) Our identity with Hashem as a nation upon whom His name rests, will play a significant role in our final redemption. The Jewish people will inherit their archenemy Edom solely because of their identity with Hashem. Our elevated standards of morality will truly earn us the title of His people and in this merit we will be finally liberated from the world's corrupt influence and environment.

This special lesson reflects the essence of this week's parsha, Kedoshim, which embodies Hashem's lofty call to us for spiritual elevation. The Torah begins and says, "Be holy for I, Hashem, am Holy." (Vayikra 19:2) Nachmanides (ad loc.) shares with us his classic insight into this mitzva. "Be holy", says the Ramban, "refers to the introduction of sanctity and spirituality into every dimension of our lives." Even our physical and mundane activities should be directed towards Hashem. We are forbidden to excessively indulge in worldly pleasures and are expected to limit our passions and pleasures to productive and accomplishing acts. Morality and spirituality should encompass our entire being and our every action should ultimately become the service of Hashem. This philosophy is diametrically opposed to that of the nations of the world. To them physical pleasure and enjoyment have no restrictions or limitations and religion does not govern their passions or cravings. As said, our standards of morality are truly unique and it is this factor that elevates us and distinguishes us from amongst the nations of the world.

The parsha concludes with this message and says, "And you shall be holy unto Me for I am holy and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine." As stated, we are Hashem's people because of our holiness-elevated moral and ethical standards-which truly separate us from the nations of the world. And in this merit we will soon experience our final redemption and be a nation unto Him, privileged to remain in His presence for eternity. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & TorahWeb.org

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

Sfas Emes

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

Once, someone stole silver spoons from the house of a great Rabbi. The Rabbi suspected that one of his students was the culprit. He investigated the matter and the spoons were found in the student's possession. The shame of being caught with the stolen property deeply affected the student and he renounced his Torah observance. Subsequently, he moved to Jaffa, Israel. He went into business and became a successful and wealthy merchant. He eventually found favor in the eyes of the king and was appointed a royal minister.

After a few years the Rabbi traveled to Israel and planned to reside in the holy city of Jerusalem. His ship arrived at Jaffa, which was the port city. His student recognized him and brought the Rabbi to his home to rest after his long journey. He brought the Rabbi into his palatial home and gave him a tour of his exquisite mansion. Finally, he brought the Rabbi into a room and locked the door. Suddenly, he pulled out a knife and told the Rabbi to say his final prayers. The Rabbi started to cry and plead for his life. His student said, "There will be no mercy. Quickly say your prayers before I kill you."

The Rabbi closed his eyes and cried out the Shema Yisrael. The student drew near and kissed the Rabbi on his forehead. He then said, "Rabbi please get up, I am not going to hurt you. I know you are a perfect tzaddik. However, you have one sin and I did not want you to have this stain upon your pure white garment when you are summoned to The World to Come. What is your sin? You placed me in a position to leave the holy Torah by revealing that I stole your spoons. This shame that you caused me was unbearable. Even though you only did it to recover your property, nevertheless, it is counted in Heaven as an enormous sin. Therefore, I brought the fear of death upon you so that you would pray and be forgiven for this sin. Now your sin has been atoned and you enter the Land of Israel with holiness and purity. Please forgive me for the distress I caused you for you are my Rabbi and master." He kissed his Rabbis feet and they parted in peace and friendship.

We should make every effort to never embarrass any other human being. Do not reveal the sin of others because you never know if they will be able to bear the shame.

Implement: Avoid embarrassing others-at all costs. © 2005 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This week's parsha is one of the central parshiot in the Torah. It describes the mitzvot which make Israel a unique nation. (Its location is practically in the middle of the parshiot of the Torah.) We are to be not only kind, just and helpful; we are to be holy!

Sensitivity to Rashi's choice of words is necessary to fully understand his message.

"Speak to the the whole congregation of the Children of Israel, and say to them 'You shall be Holy, because I, Hashem, your God am Holy.' " (Leviticus 19:2)

"You shall be holy"-RASHI: "Keep separated from the forbidden sexual relations (mentioned above) and from sinful thoughts. Because wherever you find (in the Torah) a command to fence yourself off from sexual immorality you also find mention of 'holiness.' (Some examples) 'They shall not take a wife that is a harlot or one who has been desecrated etc.' (Lev. 21:7) and the next verse, 'for I am Hashem, Who sanctifies you.' And 'Neither shall he profane his seed... for I am Hashem Who sanctifies him.' (ibid. 15)."

Rashi tells us that "holiness" here means observing the sexual code of forbidden relationships. This he undoubtedly derives from the fact that our verse comes on the heels of the last parsha where the laws of the forbidden incestuous relations are commanded.

He supports this idea by citing several verses where the laws of sexual relations are given and which are immediately followed by God's statement of holiness. We should note that all the cases cited by Rashi are sexual relations that are forbidden only to priests. With this in mind we can ask several questions of Rashi.

A Question: First of all, why does Rashi bring as evidence only cases of priestly restrictions? Certainly the ordinary Israelite also has sexual prohibitions-why aren't these cited? Secondly, there are quite a few places where the Torah forbids sexual relations and yet there is no mention of holiness. The previous parsha, Acharei Mot (Chapter 18), lists over a dozen forbidden sexual relations and yet no mention is made of "holiness." Also in Deuteronomy where the "mamzer" is forbidden, (Deut. 23: 3) there is no mention of holiness.

This is certainly strange and seems to seriously undermine Rashi's point. How can we understand this?

To understand this you must look carefully at Rashi's words.

An Answer: At the outset, I should say that I couldn't find any commentary who relates to this question. The question and answer were given to me by a Jerusalemite by the name of Rav Aaron Moshe Schwartz.

Rashi says "Any place that you find the restrictions of sexual relations... you find holiness." Note that Rashi doesn't say "sexual prohibitions"; rather, "restrictions of sexual prohibitions." The Hebrew word "geder" (fence) means restrictions beyond the ordinary restrictions, which are intended to fence one off from even approaching a forbidden act. It is only the priest who has these added restrictions; it is only from the laws of sexual purity of the priest that Rashi can bring evidence to the point he wants to make. The Talmud (Kedushin 31a) also says that the Torah placed a stricter code of conduct upon the priests.

It is for this reason that Rashi only uses examples from the priests, because they are particularly commanded to restrict themselves from certain sexual relations, above and beyond those which are required of every Jew.

This is the sign of their holiness.

That is what Rashi means when he says at the beginning of his comment "separate yourselves from sexual sins." Holiness comes not merely from observing the laws regarding the forbidden sexual relations, but rather from keeping clear of any hint of sexual impropriety. That is holiness. This coincides with the basic meaning of the word "Kedusha" (holiness) which translates: "to be separate." Hashem is "Kadosh" because He is separate from anything we can imagine. The Jew becomes Kadosh when he builds a fence around forbidden acts in order to guarantee his separation from them.

We see how precise Rashi is in his choice of words in order to make this important and fundamental point. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG

Weekly Thoughts

This weeks Torah portion tells us to 'Love your fellow as yourself'.

The Talmud in the Tractate Shabbat relates the story of the budding convert who came to the venerable sage, Hillel, and asked him to teach him the whole Torah whilst standing on one foot (the original source of the phrase 'on one foot!'). Hillel replied 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the whole Torah - the rest is commentary...'

Rabbi Akiva considered love for one's fellow a vital principle of the Torah.

Why did Hillel place so much emphasis on this particular precept? We can understand how it underlies those commandments which apply amongst between our fellow man, but how does it impact on those commandments which apply between mankind and

G-d? How is brotherly love related to keeping the Sabbath, or Kosher?

We need to look further into the concept of loving one's fellow "as oneself". How can I love someone else like myself? Ultimately, no matter how close we may become, surely we remain distinct individuals? Surely the concepts of "self" and "other" are two separate entities?

This is true when we consider our physical existence. As physical beings, self and other are indeed two distinct entities. In the spiritual realm, however, they are ultimately one, for all souls derive from the same source, united with G-d at that source. When we regard our physical selves as "I" and the soul as a mere accessory, we are indeed different from another. If, however, we regard the soul as the "I", our spiritual needs as paramount, then the differences between us become blurred and we are able to love another just as we love ourselves.

Loving another person the same way as one loves oneself involves acknowledging and nurturing our own spiritual roots, seeing ourselves.

In this week's Pirkei Avos, Ethics of the Fathers, we are told "Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in their place". Given that only one whose place you can truly stand in is yourself, we are really only qualified to judge ourselves.

Even so, human nature is the exact opposite - to be extremely forgiving and generous towards oneself and one's own failings, whilst being extremely demanding and critical of another.

This is also part of loving one's fellow as oneself. Just as we are very tolerant and forgiving towards our own shortcomings, we should learn to apply the same generosity to others around us. © 2005 Rabbi M. Wollenberg & torah.org



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