

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the many commandments contained in Parashas Kedoshim is the prohibition against oppressing a convert (Vayikra 19:33). Rashi explains this oppression to be verbal, i.e. derogatory remarks, such as reminding the convert that he used to follow a flawed belief system. The Torah then gives a reason why we shouldn't oppress the convert (19:34); "for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt." Some commentators understand this as simply meaning that we should be able to empathize with the plight of the convert, for we were also in a position of weakness when we were living in the foreign country of Egypt. Rashi, however, understands it as a correlation to the most likely verbal oppression: "Do not tell your friend that he has a flaw that you yourself have," i.e. don't make fun of a "ger" (convert) because you yourself came from "gerim" (foreigners). On a similar admonition (Shemos 22:20), Rashi elaborates: "if you oppress him, he is also able to oppress you (i.e. respond in kind), and say to you, 'you also came from "gerim.""

We can understand why Rashi does not explain the Torah's reason as being a reminder of the empathy we should have for the convert, as if the insulter still relates to the discomfort of being a foreigner (which the yearly exodus from Egypt experienced on Passover should rekindle) he wouldn't need reminding. Besides, there is a separate verse (Shemos 23:9) which explicitly says that we should refrain from oppressing the convert since we understand his pain; our verse must therefore be telling us something different. Nevertheless, there are other questions that Rashi's explanation raises.

First of all, how can the rationale for not insulting the convert be that we share the same flaw? Would it have been okay to insult him if we didn't have that flaw? Oppressing another is forbidden even if the other person is not a convert (it is just an additional prohibition if the oppressed is a convert). Are we allowed to find a flaw that we don't have and insult someone about it? Obviously not. How can Rashi imply that the prohibition against insulting the convert is predicated on our sharing the same flaw if it is forbidden no matter what?

Secondly, even though the Hebrew word for "convert" and "foreigner" is the same ("ger") because of

the shared "out of place" nature of both, they do not, in this case, refer to the same thing. Why does Rashi imply that they are the same, so that the descendent of a foreigner shouldn't insult a convert? Our "flaw" of being descended from those that, at one time, were foreigners, should have no correlation to the flaw of having previously worshipped idols.

The Chizkuni (Vayikra 19:34) addresses the second question, quoting the verse in Yehoshua (24:14) that says that our ancestors worshipped idols in Egypt. Therefore, our flaw is exactly the same as the convert's, as we are descended from those that followed a flawed faith as well. However, if this was the verse's intent, shouldn't it just say that we shouldn't make fun of the convert's past because we share the same past? Why express it in a way that makes us think the Torah means that we were foreigners in Egypt, when it really means that we were idol worshippers there? And even if the Torah doesn't want to mention this explicitly, if this is what Rashi meant, wouldn't he have explained that the Torah is referring to the idol worship in Egypt, not our being foreigners? Besides, Egypt wasn't the only place we worshipped idols, as the verse from Yehoshua itself states. Why mention the idol worship in Egypt more than elsewhere? A simple reading of the verse (and Rashi) implies that it is not the idol worship done in Egypt that is relevant to not insulting a convert, but our having been foreigners there. But how is that considered the same flaw? And why is it only a similar flaw that must be avoided, implying that other insults are acceptable?

Rashi's comments are based on several sources, including the Talmud (Bava Metziya 58b and 59b). Explaining Rabbi Nasan's statement that one should not insult another regarding a flaw that he himself has (59b, d"h mum and d"h man), Rashi makes it clear that it is not really a shared flaw that is the problem, but flaws that have similar ways of being referred to. The Talmud's example is that someone who had a relative that was hung (i.e. executed via hanging) will avoid asking that a fish be hung. The very mention of something being hung evokes bad memories. Similarly, a "ger," or someone descended from "gerim" shouldn't make fun of someone for being a "ger." That one means "foreigner" and one means "convert" is irrelevant; the point of contention is that one reminds us of the other.

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Another source Rashi is based on is the Mechilta (Mishpatim 18), which adds that our verse teaches us that the convert is allowed to insult us back (see Netziv). Based on this (the Mechilta continues), Rabbi Nasan said that one should not insult another regarding a shared flaw. In other words, Rashi is not quoting a prohibition against insulting someone that shares a flaw, but quoting advice against doing so. Do not insult a convert, because he has an easy response, i.e. that you came from foreigners yourself.

Whether one is really allowed to respond to an insult with another insult is not a simple matter. While the initial insult is classified as "oppression," the counter-insult may be a form of revenge. Taking revenge is also prohibited, but there is a discussion about whether or not this applies to responding to an insult in kind, with the Chafetz Chayim (Be'er Mayim Chayim on his introduction to Sefer Chafetz Chayim, prohibition 8-9) concluding that since it is a Biblical prohibition, one must follow the more stringent opinion. Even those that say it is allowed agree that it is better not to (see Yuma 23a). Nevertheless, the Mechilta that Rashi is based on seems to be of the opinion that it is allowed (if not recommended).

In any case, we may now have a better understanding of what Rashi means. The Torah quite clearly does not want us to oppress a convert, so tells us not to. In order to motivate us not to, it reminds us that if we do insult the convert based on his past, he can easily respond that we come from "gerim" as well. Whether he is allowed to do so or not is really beside the point; the main thing is that he might respond, so we are better off not insulting him in the first place. "Do not oppress the ger, for you were gerim in Egypt." It doesn't make sense to insult somebody if they have an easy comeback. True, we shouldn't insult anybody even if they have no comeback, but the Torah is extra-protective of converts, and, in order to prevent us from insulting one, explains why we are better off not doing so. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI LEVI COOPER

The Dining Room Altar

In the aftermath of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (temple), the Beit Knesset (synagogue) and the Beit Midrash (house of study) took the place

of the central place of worship.

Our sages add a third setting to the sites that serve the functions of our lost Temple; a somewhat unexpected locus of sanctity - the dinner table (B. Berachot 10b).

The Bible relates that a Shunamite woman recognized the holiness of the prophet Elisha, and hence encouraged her husband to build a small room with a bed, table, chair and lamp for this pious person, so that when he would pass through the area he would have comfortable lodgings (II Kings 4:8ff).

Our sages query: What indicator did the woman spy, that led her to the conclusion that the sojourner Elisha was a holy person? The first piece of evidence offered by the Talmud is that she never saw a fly pass over the table of the prophet. This indicator reminds us of another talmudic statement, that no fly was ever seen in the Temple slaughtering area, though it was awash with the blood of slaughtered animals (B. Yoma 21a).

Further in the passage, we are once again reminded of the connection between the home and the Temple altar. The Talmud declares that those who host Torah scholars in their home are considered by Scripture as if they have sacrificed a tamid offering - the twice daily sacrifice offering in the Temple. This connection is surmised from another statement of the Shunamite woman, who described Elisha as "passing tamid (regularly) among us" (II Kings 4:9).

Elisha did not visit at regular intervals, rather he stayed with the Shunamites when he perchanced in the area. The sages therefore surmise that the Shunamite woman was not describing the habitual nature of Elisha's visits, rather she was referring to their import: Elisha's calls gave her the opportunity to offer a virtual tamid sacrifice (Maharsha, 16th- 17th centuries, Poland).

Why is providing sustenance for a pious person akin to offering a sacrifice in the Temple? One authority describes a holy person as one who acts entirely for the sake of Heaven, even when engaged in routine activities such as eating. When we offer such people food, we are not merely proffering physical rations, we are in effect tendering a sacrifice to G-d (Mesillat Yesharim, 18th century, Italy-Acre).

Though this explains the connection between serving food to a righteous person and Temple sacrifices, it does not furnish a specific connection to the morning and evening tamid offering.

Relating specifically to this point, Chief Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook (1865-1935) offers a number of parallels between providing sustenance to Torah scholars and the tamid sacrifice. The tamid was a communal sacrifice offered from communal funds, and not a personal endeavor. Similarly, the responsibility to raise Torah scholars and support such leaders is not a private enterprise but a communal

undertaking. Even when individuals provide for a Torah personality, they are doing so as representatives of the community.

Furthermore, Rabbi Kook stresses that habitual service of G-d is a greater expression of devotion than periodic demonstrations. Similarly, sacrifices offered with regularity - such as the tamid - express far deeper commitment than sacrifices offered from time to time. When people provide a Torah scholar with food, they are dedicating their worldly possessions to the service of G-d, and in this way they express fidelity to the Almighty even when they are engaged in mundane activities.

This analogy goes further - the responsibility of the Torah scholar to the nation is also not one bound to a specific season; those who are dedicated to Torah are expected to provide continual light for our nation.

Finally, elsewhere our sages declare that it is incongruous that a person's sacrifice should be offered without that person being present. With regard to the communal tamid offering, a rotation system was employed where different Israelite families would be present at the offering, and they would serve as representatives of the entire nation (B. Taanit 26a). It is insufficient to merely send food to Torah leaders; hosting such people in our homes is comparable to standing next to our offering in the Temple.

Following on from this notion, later in our tractate the Talmud tells us that even if you are not the provider of the meal but you partake of a meal where a Torah scholar is present, it is as if you have benefited from the divine radiant presence (B. Berachot 64a). The sages derive this conclusion from the biblical verse: "And Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law, before G-d" (Exodus 18:12). Didn't they eat before Moses, not "before G-d?" From here the sages deduce that dining with Torah greats is akin to dining before th3).

The comparison between table and altar has a further dimension. Our sages assert that the dining table is comparable to the Temple altar, as both surfaces are used for atoning for sins. During the Temple period, criminals atoned for their crimes when bringing sacrifices; nowadays we can atone for our wrongs through our table (B. Hagigah 27a). Although the sages do not explicate how the table can be used to atone for offenses, we can understand that by inviting guests to our table and sharing precious words of our tradition we turn the table into an altar.

When we sit down to eat we are not merely satisfying our worldly need for food. We are sitting down next to an altar. How we eat, what we eat and with whom we eat can make this table into a replica of the Temple altar, and may not only provide us with physical sustenance, but also with spiritual nourishment. Perhaps we can take the parallel further: if our dining table is comparable to an altar, then our

homes in which this table is placed may have the sanctity of the Temple.

Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts. © 2006 Rabbi L Cooper. Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The word kdoshim is usually translated as holy. This is a difficult translation, although the word can certainly mean holy. The difficulty lies in defining the word holy in practical terms. One person's holiness is sometimes the destruction of others - witness all of the "holy wars" fought over the course of human civilization. A precise definition of holiness is elusive. Perhaps, therefore, the concept of kdoshim, with regard to definition, can be seen more in terms of commitment and dedication. G-d desires, so to speak, that we be committed to His program and goals for the Jewish people and for humanity generally.

This is also perhaps the understanding of the famous comment of Ramban on this subject that kdoshim demands that we do so with those areas of life that are permitted to us by the Torah. Even in our mundane pursuits in life, having apparently little to do with our state of being holy or pious, in those acts of life that are eminently permissible and sometimes even necessary for our overall welfare, we should still be committed to see the enhancement of G-d's program in those actions as well and not only in our performance of ritual and in the observance of commandments. Great flashes of spiritual uplift occur sporadically, even rarely, in one's lifetime. But commitment to G-d's Torah and to its values is an everyday possibility and requirement. And that is the crux of G-d's demand upon us to be kdoshim.

Sfat Emet in his commentary to a previous parsha (Shmini) remarks that one of the great manifestations of the yetzer haraa - the evil inclination that lurks within all humans - is the refusal to see G-d in the small and ordinary things in life. Nature is certainly natural but it is also G-dly. The wonders of the world about us, the exquisite balance within our bodies that sustains life, even the mortality that is our fate, all bespeak of a connection to the Creator of all. Commitment is the tool of focus that allows us to overcome this yetzer haraa. Many times in life, people

drift along aimlessly, eventually suffering great psychological discomfort from this state.

The Torah comes to make our lives purposeful and not aimless. One has myriad opportunities daily to do G-d's bidding and to advance the causes of goodness and virtue. This is true no matter what profession or occupation one is engaged in. It is true in retirement years as it was true in years of professional or business productivity. The commandment *kdoshim* applies to all times and circumstances in life. We read and hear of people during the Holocaust who refused to lose their humanity and remained committed in the worst of imaginable circumstances. The struggle to inculcate the Torah's value system into our daily lives is a challenging and ongoing one. But it is a struggle that can be won if pursued with tenacity and commitment. That is certainly the challenge the Torah advances to us in requesting that be *kdoshim*. © 2006 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

From a literal perspective, the names of portions are nothing more than the first major word of the part of the Torah that is read during the week. It can, however, be argued that deep meaning actually lies within the names themselves. The two portions we read this week-Acharei Mot that literally means after death, and *Kedoshim* that means holiness, are fine examples of this phenomenon.

What is the challenge that presents itself after death? In my early years of the rabbinate, I always felt that my challenge as a spiritual leader was to sit with bereaved families and help them undo the pain they were feeling. Death is a kind of darkness, a deep darkness. My role, I thought, was to remove that darkness.

But after my mother died, I stood before my congregation and apologized. Through that painful experience, I came to realize that the goal of removal is simply unrealistic. The goal is rather to find a way to cope with the suffering that comes with termination. I compared it to the following: Imagine walking into a dark room for the first time. Not knowing one's way or one's place, one trips over the furniture, unaware of which way to turn. However, after days and weeks and months and years, when one walks into that very same dark room, although the darkness still exists, with time we learn how to negotiate the furniture and we can make our way.

The truth is that after suffering a great loss, one is actually blessed if one constantly feels the darkness of the pain of termination. Such an emotion is reflective

of the power of the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased. If there is no sense of darkness, it could mean that that sense of connection has been blurred-even lost. The challenge, however, as one continues to feel the darkness, is learning how to cope, to use the analogy, learning where the furniture is and while feeling the darkness, finding a way to move about.

The last time I was at my mother's grave, my dear sister Suri, a woman of profound spirituality, turned to me and said, "Mommy is far away." I keep thinking of that comment. My mother died on Yom Kippur 1983. It is certainly a long time ago. In a certain sense my sister was right-with every year the soul seems to move further and further away.

While not denying that reality, our portions this week remind us that after life (*Acharei Mot*), there can always be *Kedoshim* - a sense of continuum that is expressed through holiness. How so? The challenge of death is to keep the person who has died alive in spirit. Indeed the Talmud says, there are some people who are actually living yet are not really alive-they're only going through the motions. On the flip side, there are others who, although physically dead, continue to live through the teachings they left behind and through those whom they have touched in life.

In Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's *Halakhic Man*, his introductory page includes the Talmudic statement that in a moment of great personal conflict, the biblical Yosef (Joseph) looked up and, in the window saw the image of his father Ya'akov (Jacob). It was Rav Soloveitchik's way of saying that his writing and teachings continue to be powerfully influenced by his late father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik.

I bless you and ask you to bless me that we always remember those who have passed on, like walking through the darkened room full of furniture. And I pray that we always feel those who are closest tapping us on the shoulder and helping us along the complex path of life. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of *Yeshivat Chovevei Torah*, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This week's parshiyot include *Kedoshim*, which is a central parsha in the Torah. Rashi, in his first comment on the parsha, notes that most of the main concepts of the Torah are to be found in it. "Love thy neighbor" is here, as well as many other "mainstays" of *Torat Hashem*. We look at one of these verses which speaks of how we should relate to converts.

"When a convert ('ger') dwells among you in your land, do not taunt him. The convert who dwells with you shall be like a native among you and you shall

love him as yourself, for you were strangers ('gerim') in the land of Egypt. I am Hashem, your G-d." (Leviticus 19:33-34)

On verse 33 Rashi comments that a Jew should not taunt a convert by saying, "Recently you were an idol worshipper, and now you (have the audacity to) learn Torah which was given by the Holy One?"

On the next verse he comments: "For you were strangers"-RASHI: "A fault you have, don't accuse your friend [of having that fault]." Considering these two Rashi-comments, what would you ask about the Torah's logic here?

A Question: Rashi says the stranger ("ger") here is a convert to Judaism (not just a foreigner in the land). If this is what the verse is referring to, then how can the Jew, who resided in Egypt as a mere foreigner, be compared to the convert? Rashi says "A fault you have," the fault of the convert is his problematic past when he worshipped idols, but weren't the Jews in Egypt foreigners, not gentiles?

What kind of comparison is being made here? Can you answer this?

An Answer: There are many Midrashim which tell us that the Jews in Egypt had plummeted to the penultimate level of impurity-the 49th level of Tuma. But a Midrash must have some Scriptural source or hint on which it bases itself. Where do we see that, in fact, the Jews in Egypt were themselves idol worshippers?

We have to go to the prophet Ezekiel to see the explicit condemnation that in Egypt the Jews too were idol worshippers.

See Chapter 20 where Ezekiel gives a brief recounting of Israel's history. Over and over G-d makes His covenant with Israel, and over and over again Israel disappoints and breaks that covenant. Nevertheless, G-d saves Israel from utter destruction, because of His name's sake. That is because it would be a desecration for G-d, if Israel were destroyed and erased from the history books. What, the gentiles would ask, about His promise to Israel? Wouldn't it appear that their G-d could not save them? For this reason and for this reason only, G-d keeps His promise to us, even if we are not always deserving of it.

See Ezekiel 20: 6-8: "On that day I lifted My hand unto them to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey...and I said 'Each man must throw away the detestable things and do not make yourselves impure with the idols of Egypt... but they rebelled against Me and would not listen to Me. They did not throw away their detestable things, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt..."

Clearly we see that the Jews themselves were idol worshippers in Egypt. Later, these same Jews came to receive G-d's Torah at Sinai. Therefore, says the Torah, with Rashi's explanation, "your own fault-don't accuse others of having!"

Throughout the Torah and Tanach we are reminded that we are never to delude ourselves into thinking that we are better than the gentiles; that we are special in our behavior, that we are "holier than thou."

Unfortunately, we do not have much to show for our "perfect behavior." We have survived. G-d has stayed with us all these millennia, not because of our specialness, but because of His word. He will not break His promise, lest it teach the world that this is a G-dless universe. © 2006 Dr. A. Bonchek and Aish.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“You must surely instruct your colleague, so that you not bear the brunt of his sin" (Lev. 19:18) Judaism teaches that "every Israelite is responsible for the other, is a co-signer for his/her fellow Jew."

Aside from the State of Israel-where the Jewish population has grown from 600,000 in 1948 to 5 & 1/2 million today-the Jews in the rest of the world suffer from internal hemorrhaging, with the six million identifying American Jews in 1940 quickly moving towards halving itself by the end of the 21st century. So how do we "instruct" our errant Jewish siblings so that they remain within-or return to-our Jewish peoplehood?

I believe that the Hebrew calendar which we are now celebrating contains the direction towards solution. We have recently celebrated the festival of Passover, and we are "counting" each day towards the festival of Shavuot. The Hebrew term for the counting is sefirah, a word pregnant with meaning. Its root noun is the Hebrew sappir, which is the dazzling blue-white sapphire diamond, the ethereal hues and colors of the heavens; as the Bible records immediately following the electrifying and inspiring Revelation at Sinai: "Moses and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy elders of Israel then went up. And they saw the G-d of Israel, beneath whose "feet" was something akin to the creation of a sapphire stone, like the essence of the heavens as to its purity" (Exodus 24:9,10)

From this perspective, the days of our counting must be seen as a period of spiritual growth and development, of a connection between Passover and Shavuot. But where and how does this spiritual journey begin? It begins with Passover, the first real encounter that G-d has with His nation Israel at its very conception. And the Hebrew sefirah (count, sapphire) is also based on the Hebrew noun sippur, a tale, a story, a re-counting the very essence of the Passover seder evening experience: "And you shall tell (haggadah, telling a story) your child on that day saying..." (Ex. 13:8); "And Moses recounted to (vayesaper) his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to Egypt because of the Israelites..." (Exodus 18:8); "It is a positive commandment of the Bible to recount (le Saper) the miracles and wonders which were done to

our forefathers in Egypt" (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Hametz and Matzah 7,1).

We must remember that the Israelites came into Egypt as a family, the seventy descendants of our grand-father Jacob-Israel. Hence the recounting of the story of our enslavement and eventual redemption is iterated and re-iterated as parents telling their children, as a familial recounting of family history. A nation is a family writ large: in a family, there are familial memories of origins, of beginnings; in a family there is a sense of blood-coated commonality and community togetherness; in a family there are special foods and customs, special holidays and celebrations; in a family there are mandated values and ideals, that which is acceptable and that which is unacceptable "in our family;" and in a family there is a heightened sense of a shared fate and shared destiny, "all for one and one for all."

Every member of a family, down to the great grand-children who were not even born when certain well-known and oft-repeated familial histories took place, feel as if they had been there, had themselves witnessed the events. Edah is the Biblical word for community (literally witness), and every real Community attempts to recreate a familial collegiality. Family members willingly sacrifice for each other, helping each other monetarily and even donating to each other a needed organ such as a kidney. The relationship within the family is largely horizontal-towards each other-rather than vertical- connected to a transcendent G-d. And familial rites of togetherness are largely governed by familial customs rather than by a Divinely ordained legal code. Most importantly in families-as well as communities- every individual counts (once again, sefirah). Each member of the family is called by his/her personal name rather than by the collective family name, and is known by his/her unique traits and characteristics, (positively as well as negatively.)

Passover is our familial, communal Festival, at the very beginning of our calendar, at the very outset of our unique history, at the early steps towards our sefirah march. At Passover we had not yet received our Torah from G-d, and we had not yet entered our Promised Land. Torah, Land of Israel, Jerusalem, Holy Temple had to wait for Shavuot. The Passover Sacrifice (Exodus 12) represents our celebration of our being part of a special, historic family, even before we became a religion at Sinai. It emphasizes our willingness to sacrifice for our freedom from slavery-our sacrifice of the lamb which was a defiant act of rebellion against the bull-G-d of Egyptian slave-society, and it attests to our uncompromising belief in human freedom and redemption. In order for everyone to really count, large communities must be subdivided into smaller-and more manageable-familial and extra-familial units, "a lamb for each household"or several households

together. Special foods, special stories and special songs define and punctuate the familial nature of the event.

And the only ticket of admission is that you consider yourself a member of the family and wish to be counted in as such; this alone entitles you to an unconditional embrace of love and acceptance, to inclusion in the family of Israel. Theological beliefs and practices of religious observance are irrelevant; the only rasha (wicked child) is the one who himself excludes himself from the family-and even he/she is to be invited and sought after!

One of the rousing songs of the earlier part of the seder is Dayenu, it would have been enough. "Had G-d only taken us out of Egypt, it would have been enough; had G-d merely brought us to Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough." Our Sages teach that when the Israelites stood at Sinai they were one people with one heart, a united, communal family. The song teaches that such a sense of familial oneness-even without the 613 commandments-would have been sufficient.

How do we engage our Jews so that they do not defect and fall away from us? We must embrace them as part of our family, love them because we are part of them and they are part of us, regale them with the stories, songs and special foods which are expressed in our Biblical National literature and which emerged from our challenging fate and our unique destiny, share with them our vision and dreams of human freedom and peace, and accept them wholeheartedly no matter what. For some of them, it may be the first step towards their march to Torah and the Land of Israel on Shavuot; for others, it might be all they are interested in. And that too must be considered good enough, Dayenu! After all, the very first covenant G-d made with Abraham was the covenant of family and nation.

A personal family postscript: My paternal grand-father was an idealistic and intellectual Communist who wrote a weekly column for the Yiddish Communist Newspaper, Freiheit. On his kitchen wall were two pictures, one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the other of Joseph Stalin. He ate on Yom Kippur and truly believed that religion "was the opiate of the masses." Nevertheless, he conducted a Passover seder each year-which I attended as a young child-with matzah, marror, charoset, and the first part of the Haggadah. He would add passages from the Prophets, the Talmud and Shalom Aleichem which dealt with consideration for the poor and underprivileged, and checked that I could space my fingers properly for the Priestly Benediction, cautioning me to understand that the blessing was for world peace.

Despite my tender years, I noticed that there was still bread and rolls in the house which, if a grand-child wished, he received. I couldn't understand the

contradiction (although I now know that on Pesach Sheni, a "second chance" one month later for those who had missed the regular Passover either because they were ritually impure, or "far away", physically or perhaps even religiously; since the Passover Meal at this Pesach Sheni could be eaten even while there was chametz in the house, this ritual seems to have been strikingly similar to my grand-fathers seder!).

And then I was riding on a train with my grand-father, and there were two elderly ultra-orthodox Jews sitting opposite us, speaking Yiddish. Two young toughs walked into our compartment, and began taunting the hassidim. At the next stop my grandfather—who was fairly tall and strong-lunged forward, grabbed the toughs, and literally threw them out the open door. When he returned to his seat next to me, I asked, 'But grand-pa, you're not at all religious?! He looked at me in dismay. "What difference does it make? They are part of our family-and I am part of their family!" Then I understood....© 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

One of the most difficult mitzvot to understand in the Torah portion of Kedoshim is the above prohibition, "Do not eat with the blood" [Vayikra 19:26]. A Baraita lists as many as five different ways to interpret this verse (see Sanhedrin 63a). Two of these possibilities are quoted by Rashi:

"This is a prohibition to eat the flesh of a sacrifice before the blood has been sprinkled and a prohibition to eat from the flesh of an animal before it has died." Most of the commentators linked this prohibition to the continuation of the verse, "Do not engage in witchcraft and do not believe in luck." This means that the sin is related to the prohibitions of magic and idolatrous fortune telling. "This is a custom of the Gentile nations, who eat at the grave of a murdered person as an offering to witches, so that they will not take revenge, or for other magical purposes" [Rashbam].

Some commentators, such as Ramban and Ibn Ezra, explained the prohibition by linking this verse to the wars fought by Shaul against the Philistines (see Shmuel I 14:31-34). We are told that at the end of the day of fighting, "The nation was very tired, and they pounced on the booty." Then, "they took sheep and cattle and slaughtered them on the ground, and the nation ate with the blood." When Shaul heard about this, he was upset, and he cried out, "You have sinned, a great stone has rolled over me today." As atonement, he commanded, "Let every man give me his ox and his sheep, and you shall slaughter them here and eat, and you will not sin to G-d by eating the blood." The Ramban feels that the sin in that case too was one of

idol worship. "The people consulted devils or sorcery in order to guide their way and they would eat blood in order to perform this act." However, the simple interpretation of the passage implies that the sin of the people was to eat ravenously, and not according to the halacha. The passage does not give the impression that the people had enough free time available for them to worry about the future.

Evidently the passage of Shaul can lead us to understand the prohibition of blood in a different way. It would seem that the main problem in the actions of the people was that they slaughtered the animals "on the ground," and that Shaul tried to solve the problem by moving the slaughtering to a large stone. This implies that the main prohibition of eating "with the blood" refers to eating while the blood is close by. (The word "al"-on-often means nearby, as for example: "For this reason, you passed by your servant" [Bereishit 18:5]; "Behold, he was standing next to the Nile" [41:1].) It is not proper for a man to eat the flesh of an animal while its blood lies spilled before him on the ground. Shaul avoided the problem by having the people slaughter the animals on a large stone and not on the ground, close to the place where they then ate.

If this analysis is correct, it implies that this prohibition is one of many others that stem from the requirement of gentle and kind ethics even with respect to animals. Thus, it would be a parallel to such laws as the following: "Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk" [Shemot 23:19]; "He and his son shall not be slaughtered on the same day" [Vayikra 22:28];

"Send away the mother, and then take the children" [Devarim 22:7]. These laws teach mankind to take control of his physical desires and to overcome his will in the face of basic moral norms.

Natural Joy in the Month of Iyar

by Rabbi Avi Cohen-Or, Head of Beit Midrash Netivot Dror, Telem

The month of Iyar provides a link between the birth of the nation of Yisrael in Nissan and the fulfillment of the process by the giving of the Torah in the month of Sivan. It is the month of "gevura"-strength-indicating taking possession of Eretz Yisrael (see "Pri Tzadik," Vayikra, discussing the month of Iyar). In the four Torah portions read during this month, the expression "When you come to the land" appears.

Thus, the sequence Nissan-Iyar-Sivan corresponds to the triplet nation-land-Torah. In Iyar, we reveal the sanctity of the Torah and the unique traits of the nation through the advantages of the land: "Everybody who lives in Eretz Yisrael can be compared to one who has a G-d" [Ketuvot 110b]; "For G-d will not abandon His nation, and He will not leave His heritage" [Tehillim 94:14] -- that is, the land. We can thus understand that the holidays of Iyar clarify our sophisticated yearning for redemption, which is built up

on a double foundation—a physical level based on spiritual ambition, created step by step within Eretz Yisrael.

In the last moments before the splitting of the Red Sea, a dual process took place, both for the nation of Yisrael and for the angels. The nation was split into four groups—those who wanted to jump into the sea, those who wanted to surrender, those who wanted to fight, and those who wanted to cry out to the Egyptians. The angels, on the other hand, understood the process that had already begun and wanted to burst forth in praise, but they were stopped by a serious question: was it right to sing praise at all? While it was true that Yisrael was saved, the multitudes of the Egyptians were about to drown, and before the Torah was given it was not easy to tell the difference between the two nations. "Those were idol worshippers, and the others were also idol worshippers." How could they sing the praises of the Almighty for destroying evil people?

The answer to the angels was that it really was not proper for them to sing praise. "When my creatures are drowning in the sea, how can you sing my praise?" According to "Minchat Asher," a commentary on the Hagaddah, if Bnei Yisrael had asked for permission they would also have been commanded not to sing a song of praise!

Thus, it seems that the epic poem at the Red Sea burst forth spontaneously from the throats of all four groups among Bnei Yisrael, as a natural act, and then the Almighty agreed and sang together with them. And that is the way that the epic poem of Shirat Hayam was created (see Yalkut Shimoni Shemot 242). Only later, when the Torah was given, would the difference between Yisrael and Egypt be revealed, and then it would be clear why the praise was justified, based on the logic of the Torah. In the end, it was the ability of the nation to rise up above all their internal differences and to give vent to their natural feelings of thanks for the redemption that led to their salvation.

Let us hope and pray that we will have the privilege for all the different sectors of the nation to feel the outpouring of natural joy in the holidays of the month of Iyar, leading to a deep understanding and full acceptance of the Torah in the month of Sivan.

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

You shall love your fellow as yourself—I am Hashem." (19:18) The Gemara (Shabbat 31a) relates the now well-known incident in which a prospective convert asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while the convert stood on one leg. Hillel replied, "That which is hateful to you do not do to your friend. That is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary—go learn it!" Many commentaries ask: Is this really the entire Torah?

R' Eliyahu Shick z"l (see biography below) explains: This can be understood in light of the following midrash: Rabbi Akiva says, "You shall love your fellow as yourself"—this is a major principle of the Torah. Do not say, "Since I have been debased, let my friend be debased with me. Since I have been ruined, let my friend be ruined with me." Rabbi Tanchuma added to this, [the midrash continues,] "If you do, know whom it is that you are debasing, for man was made in G-d's image."

R' Shick continues: Before Adam's sin, man's body and soul both were pure. As a result of Adam's sin, the body was damaged and it must now die in order to achieve its correction. Also, the Gemara (Shabbat 153b) comments on the verse in Kohelet (12:7), "The soul returns to G-d Who gave it"—"Return it to Him as He gave it to you. Just as He gave it to you in a pure state, so you should return it in a pure state." This implies that man's sins not only do not rectify the damage to his body, they also damage his soul. Indeed, the body and soul are called "friends." If you harm one, you harm the other.

The entire purpose of performing Torah and mitzvot is to correct the damage caused by Adam's sin, R' Shick writes. This is what Hillel meant: "That which is hateful to you do not do to your friend." That which is hateful to your body, do not do to your soul. That is the essence of the entire Torah.

Why did Hillel phrase his instruction as a negative commandment? Why did he not say, "You shall love your fellow as yourself"? R' Shick suggests an alternative explanation to the Gemara which answers this second question. [Ed. note: Since neither explanation answers both our questions, perhaps R' Shick meant them to be complementary, not alternatives.]

The Talmud Yerushalmi comments that a person who accidentally cut off one of his hands would never cut off his other hand in revenge. This is the attitude that we should adopt towards the harm caused to us by other Jews. Each of us is part of the same body of Klal Yisrael. Just as we would never take revenge on our own bodies, so we should never take revenge on our fellow Jews.

It turns out that the statement, "That which is hateful to you do not do to your friend" alludes to two different commandments. One of them is, in fact, the mitzvah of "You shall love your fellow as yourself." However, Hillel's statement also reminds us of another prohibition found in this week's parashah, i.e., the prohibition on taking revenge. (Ein Eliyahu) © 2006 Rabbi S. Katz and torah.org

