

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Parashas Kedoshim contains many laws regarding how we should treat each other, including the most famous one, usually translated "love your neighbor as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18). However, there are several different words employed by the Torah to indicate the "other" that we are supposed to act properly towards. The above example uses the word "reyacha," as does the verse warning us not to withhold wages (19:13) and the one telling us not to allow harm to befall another (19:16). Other verses use the word "amisecha," such as not lying to (or about) another (19:11), judging others fairly (19:15) and rebuking someone who has done something wrong (19:17). Although the word "uchicha" literally means "your brother," it is often used euphemistically to mean a relative or a friend. In our Parasha, we are told, "do not hate your brother in your heart" (19:17), even though it obviously means every Jew-or more precisely, every Torah-abiding Jew (see Pesachim 113b and Sefer Hachinuch, mitzvah #238) -- not just those we are related to. We are also told (19:16) not to be a talebearer "among your people" ("be'amecha"), and (19:18) not to take revenge or hold a grudge against "benai amecha," your fellow Jews. Why are there so many nouns to describe others? And what nuances differentiate them?

We've already seen a possible difference between the last two, as "your nation" seems to include anybody who is Jewish while "your brother" only refers to those that are committed to keeping the Torah. The first two expressions are also said to exclude non-religious Jews (see Bava Metzia 111b, Rambam's Hilchos Rotzeach 4:11, Shevuos 30a and Yalkut Shimoni 613), leaving us to try to distinguish between "uch," "reya" and "amis." The last two are even trickier, as the Targumim translate both as "friend" ("chaver"), and Rav Saadya Gaon (Vayikra 5:21) translates "amiso" as "reyaihu." And although "uch" literally means "brother," we still need to figure out why it is sometimes used instead of "reya" or "amis."

The shoshon (root) of "amisecha" is Ayin-Mem-Suf, the same shoshon as "le'umas" (as in "zeh le'umas zeh"), which means "side by side" or "one opposite the other." In other words, Ayin-Mem-Suf connotes things that are parallel or compared with each other;

something that is similar to the other. "Amisecha" would therefore be "someone who is similar to you" (hence the connotation of a fellow Torah-abiding Jew). There is no personal relationship inherent in being similar, just that the two are similar.

The shoshon of "reyacha" is Reish-Ayin-Hey, the same as "ro'eh," a shepherd, or one who tends to others. Two people who care about each other, do things for each other, and have a relationship with each other are therefore referred to as "reyim," friends. Friends can be similar, and it would be difficult to have a real friendship without sharing values and/or interests, but the term indicates their friendship, not their similarities. Following this continuum, "achvah," brotherhood, refers to an even closer relationship, where the two consider themselves "like brothers." All that is left to do now is to try to explain why the Torah chose one term over the other in each specific instance.

The term "reya" is used many more times in the Torah than either "amis" or non-related "achim," indicating that the Torah considers us all to be "friends" with each other. Since most people don't know most other people, even in the frum community, they can't have a personal relationship with everyone else, and can't literally be their "friends." It would seem, then, that the Torah is telling us that we should consider each other "friends" even if we've never met before. We should therefore help each other whenever the opportunity arises, and certainly not harm each other, even if there wasn't any direct personal relationship up until that point. Along these same lines, when the Torah calls us "brothers," it must be a message that we should consider ourselves even closer than friends. I would suggest that the Torah tells us to act like friends when referring to how we should treat each other, and feel like brothers when referring to how we should think and/or feel about each other. It may also be that the Torah is asking us to show the same kind of allegiance that we would show a real brother even if there was an obstacle preventing feelings of friendship. After all, we can choose our friends, not our relatives, but must support our relatives regardless of our feelings towards them. Therefore, the Torah tells us not to hate a "brother" in our heart, i.e. think of him as a brother. Similarly, when warning us not to inflict more than the appropriate amount of lashes, the Torah adds, "lest your brother become belittled in your eyes" (Devarim

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25:3). The question becomes why the Torah occasionally uses the less-friendly and more formal term "amis" instead of "reya."

There are only eleven times where the Torah uses this term, and for some of those there is a parallel verse that uses the term "reya" in the same context (see Vayikra 5:21 and 19:13, and 18:20 and 20:10), indicating that the prohibition applies whether there is actually a personal relationship or not. To avoid being excessively tedious, I will limit this discussion to the times the term "amis" is used in our Parasha.

We are told not to lie to (or about) each other (19:11), and the Sifra (Parshesa 2:4) tells us that the term "amis" (as opposed to "reya," see Raavad) teaches us that it also applies to not lying to (or about) the opposite gender, indicating that Chazal didn't consider the possibility of mixed-gender (platonic) personal relationships. (It also indicates that Chazal viewed the sexes as being separate but equal, hence the term "amis.") Nevertheless, we would need to explain why it would be specifically here that we are taught this. It may be because the verse refers to swearing falsely in court, and the plaintiff could just as easily be of the opposite gender (as opposed to most situations, where the genders would be separate), or because the Torah does not want to limit the severity of lying/swearing falsely even if there is no personal relationship.

Judges are admonished to treat each litigant fairly and equally (19:15), and it is easy to understand why the Torah would not want a judge to consider any litigant a "friend." The Ozneyim La'Torah suggests that part of the message is to view the litigants as being their equals ("amis"); that they not are more important because of their judicial position.

The commandment to give rebuke to "those similar to us" follows "not hating our brother in our hearts" (19:17), with the commentaries explaining that that if we think somebody wronged us we should discuss it with them, as we may have misunderstood what happened, or they may not have realized what they did. By rebuking them, the misunderstanding or the mistake can be corrected, and the relationship restored. In any case, at the time of the rebuke, a wrong was perceived, so it would be difficult to call the other a "friend." Either way, the gamut of the "other"

was covered, ranging from considering him a "brother" to recognizing that he is "similar to you."

Although there are certainly many reasons why the Torah uses the different terms in each specific case, at the very least we may have begun to understand what each of the terms indicates. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In this week's portion, the Torah describes the commands relevant to fruit during the first five years of the life of a tree. "And when you arrive in the land and plant any fruit tree, you shall restrict the fruit. For three years it will be forbidden, and it may not be eaten. And in the fourth year, all of the fruit will be holy, sanctified to G-d. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, adding its crop to your harvest." [Vayikra 19:23-25]. The prohibition to eat the fruit during the first three years stems from the definition in the Torah of such fruit as "orlah," and Bnei Yisrael have been commanded to refrain from partaking of it. What is the meaning of this prohibition? What does the word "orlah"? something that is contaminated? have to do with fruit?

Evidently the term "orlah" refers to a cover, like a human foreskin, which we have been commanded to remove. This is also the meaning of the verse, "And you shall remove the 'orlah' of your hearts" [Devarim 10:16], which implies that a cover should be removed from the heart. The same is true of the lament, "Whom can I talk about, to whom can I bear witness who will then listen? Behold, their ears are covered and they cannot hear." [Yirmiyahu 6:10]. This also refers to something covering the ears, which prevents the people from listening. In view of this explanation, the mitzva of orlah is a command for Bnei Yisrael to "cover" the fruit for three years, and then in the fourth year to sanctify it.

However, it is tempting to compare the status of the fruit which is orlah during the first three years to that of a boy during the first days of his life, who is also called "arel," until "on the eighth day, let the flesh of his 'orlah' be circumcised" [Vayikra 12:3]. The similarity is not only in the use of the word orlah but also in the fact that removing the cover leads to a holy status. The fruit is holy during the following year, just as circumcision on the eighth day leads to "a covenant between Me and you" [Bereishit 17:11]. But we may still ask: what is the real connection between these two subjects? After all, there is no cover that is physically removed from fruit like the foreskin in man.

The Ramban explains the reason for the prohibition as follows: "During the first three years, the fruit is not suitable to be brought before G-d because only a small amount is produced and the tree does not give the fruit a good taste or odor during the first three

years. In fact, most of the trees do not produce fruit until the fourth year. We therefore wait with all the trees and we do not taste their fruits until we bring from the 'neta'? the fruit of the fourth year? and sanctify it before G-d." We can add to this thought based on the correspondence between the orlah of the fruit and the orlah of man. In both cases, a period of maturing is needed before an object can be sanctified to G-d. In the past we have discussed the link between the two verses, "If a woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, she shall be impure for seven days, for as many days as her impure flow. And on the eighth day his foreskin shall be removed." [Vayikra 12:1,3] and "This is what you shall do to your ox and your sheep? Let it be with its mother for seven days, and on the eighth day you may give it to me" [Shemot 22:29]. Anything that has been newly created should remain in its natural state for an initial period of time and only afterwards go beyond, leading into two other stages? sanctification to G-d and allowing mankind to benefit from it.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Neither shall you practice divination nor soothsaying ..." (Lev. 19:26). What does the Torah say about the skies of the Zodiac whose predictions grace the pages of so many daily newspapers and magazines? Columns on astrology have become as common as the sports section.

Most of us believe that because we're living in the first decade of the 21st century, idol worshiping is dead, just a shadow of what it once was, limited to corners of the Far East or among prehistoric jungle tribes. But according to Maimonides' understanding of idol worship, if you've ever changed your path because of a black cat, or altered a decision because of an astrological reading, then you're trafficking in some form of idolatry, and what seems an innocent, harmless superstition is actually a forbidden transgression.

In this week's Torah reading, Kedoshim, G-d forbids the Jewish people to practice divination or rely on soothsayers, mediums (mediatory, as it were, between the world of the living and the world of the dead) or arbitrary signs which affect future events. Rashi, quoting the Talmud (B.T. Sanhedrin 60) forbids "people who divine using weasels or birds, or bread that fell from his mouth or if a stag crossed his path," he would or would not go to a certain place, or do a certain thing. Maimonides, in his formulation of idolatrous practices (Laws of Idol Worship, Ch. 11:4) also seems to reflect the account in Tractate Sanhedrin when he writes of those who say "... since my bread fell from my mouth I'm not going to such and such a place ... or since a fox passed on my right side, I'm not leaving the house today" In the same paragraph, Maimonides continues with his discussion of what happens when

someone makes signs for himself by saying: "If this and this occurs to me, I will do it...." And the example he uses to illustrate what he considers to be divining or following signs is rather astonishing: he cites Eliezer's agency to find a suitable wife for Isaac. Now we usually think of Eliezer's mission as virtuous and not tainted by an idolatrous shadow. Let us review Eliezer's "act of divination:"

Arriving at the outskirts of the city, Eliezer stops near the well, aspiring with all his strength to find the right wife for his master Abraham's son. He comes up with the following plan (test): "If I say to a damsel, 'Tip over your jug and let me have a drink,' and she replies, 'Drink and I will also water your camels,' she will be the one You have designated." (Gen. 24:14)

Maimonides' inclusion of Eliezer is based on the Talmudic Tractate, Hulin 95b, which quotes Rav: "Divining that is different from Eliezer, the slave of Abraham, and Jonathan, son of Saul is not called divining," a passage that implies that both Eliezer and Jonathan's behavior were unacceptable in the eyes of the Bible.

The Ra'N (Rabeinu Nissim) disagrees. In his Hidushai HaRa'N (Hulin 95b), he points out that when the Torah forbids devising signs or omens, it depends on whether the sign is logical or arbitrary, the former being permissible and only the latter forbidden. After all, there is a world of difference between bread that falls from one's mouth, or a black cat crossing one's path, and Eliezer's sign that was based on common sense and lovingkindness. In the words of the Ra'N, "If someone says 'If it rains, I won't go outside,' this can't be called divination because such conduct is the way of the world. And Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, and Jonathan, son of Saul, behaved this way.... Eliezer knows the wife for Isaac must be perfectly suitable, and he takes as a sign that if she acts graciously and wholeheartedly, not only restoring his soul by quenching his thirst, but offering water to the camels as well, she is heaven-sent," she is then the most fitting wife for Isaac!

The Jonathan incident referred to by the Ra'N occurs when Jonathan faces a Philistine garrison, and addresses his armor-bearer: "Behold, we will pass over to these men ... and if they say to us, 'Tarry until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place but if they say to us, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the Lord has delivered them into our hand, and this shall be a sign to us" (1 Samuel 14:8-10).

The Ra'N is not worried that Jonathan calls this a sign; he interprets the dialogue logically: "If the enemy will say, 'Come up to us,' it means they are looking upon Jonathan and his men as their enemy, and are afraid of an ambush; Jonathan was confident in his strength that he and the armor-bearer would defeat them, because the nature of the world is that two or three chivalrous soldiers can attack and overcome an

enemy who fears them. But if they say, 'Tarry until we come to you,' it would seem from their words that they have not fear, and in such an instance it wouldn't be right to risk his [Jonathan's] life" For the Ran, any such logical sign is quite alright.

Maimonides however, is uncompromising. He forbids any kind of mediation, any formulation whatever which suggests that any specific human or animal action is a sign from G-d. We dare not second guess the Divine, presume to understand His will on the strength of what is even a logical occurrence, or test Him with a sign of any sort. Had Eliezer formulated his plan as his test of suitability for a wife, it would have been perfectly acceptable; the moment he attributed it to a sign from G-d, it bordered upon idolatry. As Rabba bar Chana says in the name of R. Shmuel ben Marta, "How do we know that we aren't allowed to make inquiries of astrologers [Chaldeans]? Because of the verse, 'You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your G-d,' (Deut. 18:13). Act in accordance with G-d's laws which He devised; do not presume to understand His ways by means of signs (even logical ones) that you may devise! © 2008 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

In this week's Torah portion, G-d gives the Jewish people certain laws that will lead to them having a more fulfilling life. One of the laws is: "In the presence of an old person shall you rise..." (Lev. 19:32)

Rising in the presence of any person is certainly a sign of honor and respect. So what is about a person who's achieved "old age" that G-d tells the Jewish people that he should be so revered?

Perhaps it's because there's nothing in the world quite like experience. When a person gets older, he's lived a set of experiences that all the money in the world couldn't buy. Your brain records everything that it's ever exposed to. There are literally billions of pieces of data right now stored in your brain-everything you've ever seen, smelt, and heard. This is why if you saw someone on the street that you haven't seen in ten years, you'll still be able to recognize instantly who he is. In fact, you'll even know if he's gained or lost weight since the last time you saw him!

The thing to realize is that all decisions you'll ever make are based upon all your previous life experiences. Therefore, an older person-no matter who he is or what he's done with his life-simply has more life experiences on which to base his decisions, opinions, and actions. This certainly doesn't mean that older people always know the right answers or can give the best advice. However, elderly people will have something that someone younger just can't have. And that's a unique perspective and powerful insights that more years living in this world has given them.

G-d wants us always to remember just how valuable an elderly person's observations and advice can be. It's so worthy, in fact, that when you're "...in the presence of an old person shall you rise." And even if you don't physically stand up for him, don't compound this by not listening to what he has to say with open ears and a wide open mind. His advice could just give you the fresh perspective you've been missing. © 2008 Rabbi A. Lieberman and aish.com

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“**A**nd you shall love your neighbor as yourself...(Vayikra 19:18) When a convert requested of Hillel to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot, Hillel told him, "That which is hateful to you do not do to your friend. All the rest is commentary. Go and learn!" (Shabbos 31A) Why did Hillel not say what Rabbi Akiva called, "the general rule in the Torah", "and you should love your neighbor as yourself"? Why did he appeal to the standard of not doing what is hateful?

A king was concerned that the neighboring nation was planning to attack. He didn't know whom to trust so he dressed in ordinary clothing and crossed the border himself. Happily he found not even a whisper of what he had feared and he was ready to head home when something terrible happened. One local citizen studying his face said accusingly, "You're that king!" He panicked and ran. There was a shout, "Let's get him!" Soon a giant mob was chasing him. He managed to dodge the hordes till, in desperation, he rapped on a random door. An elderly Jew noticing his pitiful state took him in. The king told the old man, we'll call Abe, that he was a king and he's running for his life. The next concern was, "Where to hide?" Abe took him to a small hall closet where linens are kept. He stuffed the king into that tiny place where he could hardly breathe and covered him over with pillows. Suddenly an angry army burst in. They searched the usual places and then they opened the closet where the king was hiding. A soldier plunged a sword deeply into each shelf five times before they left. When the boots faded into the night he opened the closet again expecting a corpse but when he removed the pillows he found the king white like a ghost but unscathed. The sword missed each time within a hair's breadth. Abe housed him till the search died down. The farewell it was with emotion. The king thanked him profusely and promised him that in repayment for his kindness he would grant Abe any request.

After the king left, Abe went to the market but no one accepted his money because they suspected him of having harbored the king. Abe had no choice. He had to flee. He made his way to the king's palace. Ragged and hungry he shouted to the guards to let him in. His request was met with derision but after days of

pleading they sent a message that a silly old man named Abe insisted on seeing the king. They were surprised by the executive order to rush him in. Before the amazed court they sat together eating luscious fruits and being entertained by jesters. The king asked Abe if he had any requests before retiring for the night. Reflecting on the great contrast of settings Abe asked the king what it felt like when he was in that closet and the swords were probing. The king's face became beet red. He clapped his hands. Soldiers whisked him away to the dungeon. He stayed there for days in total darkness. He heard constant banging. Afterwards soldiers dragged him into a bright sun lit courtyard where a stage had just been built. There was the king seated on the stage before a large audience. Abe was led prayerfully to the platform where a noose was slipped over his head. The king raised his hand and a man with a black hood grabbed a lever to open the trap door beneath. The King queried, "Any last requests?" The old Jew tearfully asked, "Why? What did I do wrong?" To which the king answered, "Nothing! You asked me how it felt when I was in the closet. Well, this is how it felt! If I only explained it, you would never know what it really felt like."

We never know completely what other people really feel because we are locked within our own universe of feelings. We can extrapolate from our own experiences, though, since we can know more certainly how we feel. The initiate, however most likely possesses an incomplete and yet unripe menu of actions to draw upon. Hillel must have understood that it is probable that everyone has a rich list of hurtful episodes to inform him about what not to do and that is a good place to begin. © 2008 Rabbi L. Lam and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why does the Torah conclude the mandate to honor the elderly with the words "I am the Lord (ani Hashem)?" (Leviticus 19:32) What is the connection between the elderly and recognizing G-d?

Often it is the case that the elderly suffer from simple neglect. In other words, one could pay little attention to the elderly, claiming to be unaware of their needs. In the words of Rashi "I might think that one can close his eyes as though he did not see him [the elderly]?" Therefore, the Torah states "I am the Lord." G-d is everywhere, and sees everything, and G-d also knows the motives within the heart of every human being. He knows who is deceiving the elderly, making believe not to see them.

Another possibility: The term, "the Lord (Hashem)" is really a compound of the verbs "was," "is," and "will be." G-d is, after all, above time. As such, He is all at once past, present and future.

This concept teaches an important lesson concerning treatment of the elderly. In contemporary

society, the elderly are, by and large, cut off. This happens because, as individuals become older, less is expected of them. In turn, the elderly begin to expect less of themselves and perceive themselves as being less important. The consequence is a policy of isolation in which the elderly are kept out of sight in their homes, institutions or retirement centers.

Judaism sees it differently. The elderly, through their wisdom, experience, maturity and creativity have much to contribute to the larger world. Writing about older years, Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel says, "old age [should] not be regarded as the age of stagnation, but as the age of opportunities for inner growth...They are indeed formative years, rich in possibilities to unlearn the follies of a lifetime, to see through inbred self deceptions, to deepen understanding and compassion, to widen the horizon of honesty, to refine the sense of fairness."

Whereas most of society promotes a philosophy of pushing the elderly out, Judaism believes in the philosophy of absolute inclusion and embrace, an approach of complete interaction of the old with the young. Hence, the Torah concludes this mandate with "I am the Lord." As G-d is of all ages, so too should all ages interface and so too can all ages make significant contributions to society.

Rabbi Benjamin Blech offers one other insight which explains the addendum "I am the Lord." He argues that G-d is telling us that since He is the oldest in the universe, He is particularly concerned about those who share this divine quality of age and He is concerned about how they are treated.

I have always believed the maxim that the test of a community is the way it treats its most vulnerable members—a category that surely includes the elderly. If the vulnerable are mistreated, the victims are not the only ones being harmed. The victimizers lose, too, and so does the community. G-d is hurt as well, because by disrespecting the elderly, we show disrespect to G-d. © 2008 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.

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS

Torah Bytes

Parshat Kedoshim begins with the commandment to "Be holy." How do we achieve holiness? Nachmanides explains that holiness is the result of exercising restraint in areas that are permitted to you.

For example, let's say a person keeps kosher. It may be no great challenge for him to refrain from eating a ham sandwich. But the question is: When he sits down to eat kosher food, what is his frame of mind: Does he pronounce a blessing with concentration, appreciating G-d's gift of bounty? Does he eat slowly

and with dignity? Does he focus on the fact that the ultimate purpose of food is to nourish the body-in order to have strength to do good deeds?

The story is told of the Baal Shem Tov, the great kabbalist, who looked out the window and saw his neighbor sitting at the dinner table. In the eyes of the Baal Shem Tov, the neighbor appeared not as a human, but as an ox. The neighbor was eating for purely physical reasons, just as would an ox (and the holy Baal Shem Tov was able to perceive this). Although the neighbor was acting in a permitted manner, it was not a holy one.

Sometimes a child will do something that demonstrates particular self-discipline, and the parent will say: "You're an angel!" But in actuality, the child is greater than an angel. An angel is a purely spiritual being, with no sense of "free will" to choose spirituality over the mundane. But we humans-every time we make such a choice-refine our soul, and achieve a level higher and holier than even that of angels. © 2008 Rabbi S. Simmons and aish.com

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah's demand this week to be kdoshim - holy, pious, dedicated and sanctified - seems at first glance to be quite a tall order. Is it not unrealistic for the Torah to ask people immersed in trying to get through the day, make a living for themselves and their families, fight illnesses and the difficulties of society and life generally, to raise themselves somehow to a level of being kdoshim?

This week's parsha contains many varied and different mitzvot which deal with all areas of human life and experience. In fact, the parsha contains the greatest number of mitzvot in the Torah. It is not coincidental that this plethora of mitzvot occurs in the parsha of kdoshim. The Torah intends to point out to us that mitzvot are the building blocks - the stepping stones to achieving the goal of kdoshim. However, the mitzvot therefore are not to be seen as being an end in themselves. The true and intended end and goal is kdoshim. The mitzvot are the Torah's description of the means available to achieve that end goal. We pay great attention to the mitzvot, their halacha and minutiae, and correctly and necessarily so.

But many times people become bogged down in the mitzvot without realizing the goal of kdoshim that lies at the heart and purpose of mitzvot. The Talmud compares mitzvot to silver, money, wealth. Just as wealth is only a means to do good and achieve a better life and should never be viewed as the end and final goal itself, so too the mitzvot are the beginning of the process of human elevation and not the end goal all in itself.

Judaism emphasizes the means and not just the goal. Both the means and goal are prescribed to us

by heavenly fiat. For Jews, attainment of kdoshim is an elusive target. All of Jewish history has shown that those who attempted to achieve kdoshim without the means of mitzvot, in the main have failed. But even punctilious observance of mitzvot does not always guarantee kdoshim.

Ramban in his famous comment states that one can be a 'naval' - an objectionable, obnoxious, even obscene person - within the parameters of seeming Torah observance. The entire thrust of the famed Mussar movement in nineteenth century Lithuania and of the Chasidic revolution was to rectify this matter. G-d wants not only our mechanical observance of mitzvot, as important as that is, but also our heartfelt commitment to be a morally better person.

Thus the Torah's demand is not an unreasonable one for it describes the only way to achieve true humanity and immortality. By using the mitzvot as our guide in life's behavior and by remembering that behind the mitzvot, so to speak, stands G-d to Whom we are eventually responsible for our actions, thoughts and deeds, we have an opportunity to reach that sublime goal of being kdoshim.

The discipline of mitzvot creates an opportunity for spiritual growth and greatness. But it is up to us to truly exploit that opportunity to its fullest. © 2008 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 ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

The Talmud (Sotah 14a) instructs us in the Mitzvah of imitating G-d in all His ways. Just as G-d clothes the naked, visits the sick, comforts mourners and buries the dead, so should you emulate His example. Maimonides (Mourning 14:1) mentions all the above Mitzvot, but gives another source: the Torah commandment to "love your friend as yourself."

Why the twofold source for the Mitzvah of performing acts of kindness? The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 24:7) relates: "Rabbi Akiva said, 'Love your neighbor as yourself-this is a great rule in Torah.' Ben Azzai said, 'This is the book of the generations of man... in the image of G-d was man fashioned' is a greater rule, for one should not say, 'Since I was shamed, so, too, should my friend be shamed with me. Since I was cursed, so, too, let my friend be cursed with me.'"

Rabbi Akiva, as Hillel before him, saw in the commandment "Love your friend as yourself" the foundation of the entire Torah. The purpose of the entire Torah, Maimonides says (Chanukah 4:14), is to bring peace and harmony to the world, and in order to

achieve this, one must conduct himself so that those things which are hateful and repulsive to him are not done to his friend.

Ben Azzai, however, feared rooting a person's conduct toward others in his own subjective feelings and making what is hateful to him the standard for his conduct toward others. There is always a danger that a person might become hardened or insensitive to being shamed or cursed after repeated instances, and thus less sensitive to the need not to humiliate or curse others. Therefore, said Ben Azzai, "in the image of G-d was man fashioned," is a more all-encompassing source for our duties to our fellow men.

Although both verses seem to apply exclusively to relationships between man and his fellow, Rashi (Talmud, Shabbos 31a) points out that G-d is also referred to as "your friend" and one must also relate to Him in peace and harmony. In addition, the relationship between one's soul and body must be harmonious. "Love your friend as yourself" thus applies equally to all relationships: between man and G-d, between man and man, and between man and himself. It thus encompasses the entire Torah. (Rabbi Akiva agreed with Ben Azzai that an appreciation of the intrinsic worth of the individual is crucial, but felt it was implied in the words "as yourself." A person must first have a proper understanding of his own intrinsic self-worth in order to fulfill the Mitzvah to relate to his friend in a similar fashion.)

There are two reasons for the respect the Torah requires us to show others. One is communal; the other focuses on the individual. The first arises out of the desire to bring peace and harmony to the world; the second because each human being intrinsically deserves the respect and honor befitting one created in the Divine Image. On the one hand, the Torah is concerned with the individual and the development of the Divine Image within him; on the other hand the Torah is concerned with the community, with the social interactions between people.

At times, these two concerns are harmonious: what is good for the individual is good for the community and vice versa. But there are times when these concerns are in conflict, and the individual's needs conflict with those of the community. Sometimes the community must yield to the individual, and sometimes the individual must sacrifice for the community. This balance between individual and community is crucial to a proper observance of the Torah and a development toward perfection.

In Parshat Kedoshim, there are a series of Mitzvot which highlight the importance of the individual, while at the same time not losing sight of the importance of the individual as a part of the community. On the one hand, the community does not become the supreme value, robbing the individual of his intrinsic importance. At the same time, the individual must

recognize that he does not exist in a vacuum, that he is a member of society whose actions profoundly affect others. The Torah exhorts us, "Do not spread gossip." Respect the privacy of the individual. And likewise, "Do not stand by with respect to your friend's blood"-be willing to exert efforts to save the life of a fellow Jew, for every Jew is an entire world. At the same time, do not lose sight of the equal importance for unity and interaction. Thus, "Do not despise your brother and distance yourself from him by harboring negative feelings in your heart," thereby causing division in the common soul that binds all Jews. Likewise, the Torah continues with a command to recognize our responsibility to others by reproving them when necessary. Do not say: I'll mind my own business; live and let live.' Your fellow Jew is your business.

The command, "Do not take revenge" also forces us to recognize the communal nature of the Jewish people. The Jerusalem Talmud compares taking revenge on a fellow Jew to one who accidentally strikes his left hand while hammering-and then takes the hammer into his bruised left hand and strikes his right hand!

Now we can understand the necessity for two sources in the Torah for deeds of kindness. On the one hand, one must do kindness out of recognition of the intrinsic value of his fellow Jew, who is a reflection of the Divine Image. In addition, one must also consider the ramifications of his actions on society, and do kindness to promote peace and harmony on a communal level. Both of these aspects are fundamental and crucial to the proper service of Torah. The students of Rabbi Akiva-despite learning from their teacher that loving one another as themselves is the basis of the entire Torah- failed to adequately honor the Divine Image in each other or acknowledge one another as partners in developing society.

Our mourning over their deaths during this period reinforces our recognition of respect for our fellow man as the basis of our relationship with G-d. We must appreciate our own individual worth as human beings created in G-d's image, as well as the intrinsic worth of all our fellow Jews. At the same time, we must also recognize the equal importance of the group and our need to unite peacefully and harmoniously into a cohesive community. © 2008 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.com

RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG

Between the Lines

In this week's Torah portion, we find the famous imperative, "Love your fellow as yourself, I am G-d" (Leviticus 19:18). Rashi (on Torat Kohanim) cites Rebbe Akiva, who said of this mitzvah, "This is a great principle in Torah" (Zeh klal gadol baTorah). From these few words, a number of questions come to mind:

Why does the verse, "Love your neighbor as yourself" conclude with the words, "I am G-d"? (This

question can be asked every time a verse concludes with the words, "I am G-d," but for now, we will focus on this verse.) The implication of this statement is, "I am G-d who commands you to do this mitzvah." Surely we know by now, more than halfway through the Torah, that we perform mitzvot because they are the will of G-d! What does this statement mean?

What does Rebbe Akiva mean when he says, "This is a great principle in Torah"? Since when do our Sages rate the mitzvot?

Rashi, in many other places, explains that the statement, "I am G-d" comes to teach us that G-d is "ne'eman l'shalem s'khar"-that He is believed to pay reward. Why does Rashi use the word "ne'eman," which implies belief, instead of the seemingly more appropriate word "batuach" (sure)? Divinely-allotted reward and punishment is not dependent on our belief; it is guaranteed! Why not say so?

Maimonides suggests an idea that will help us resolve these difficulties. He states that two people can perform exactly the same mitzvah, yet be granted entirely different amounts of Heavenly reward. How is this fair? Maimonides explains that one person may have performed the mitzvah with great difficulty, whereas the other person may not have been challenged by it at all. A simple example is with the mitzvah of tzedaka (charity). A rich person who gives a dollar to a needy individual is judged quite differently than a person who is struggling to get by, yet still manages to scrape together a dollar to give to charity. We are rewarded according to the level of effort we put into our performance of mitzvot and the level of difficulty this entails.

Now we can answer our third question. Rashi says that G-d is believed to pay reward, rather than saying He is guaranteed to do so, because we must believe that G-d takes into consideration the effort we put into our mitzvot. Although the actions themselves do have inherent value, the level of difficulty for us in performing them leads to differing levels of spiritual reward. There is no way we could ever empirically compute this-so we must believe that G-d knows how to combine all the variables and reward us fairly.

In order to answer our two remaining questions, we must explore the accepted concept among philosophers that love can exist between people only when they have many things in common. The Tiferet Shmuel (vol. 1) explains that, based on this idea, one might mistakenly think that it would be difficult for great leaders and scholars to love common, ordinary people. If love depends on similarity, how could a scholar who spends his days delving into the intricacies of Jewish texts possibly cultivate love for the average person? What does an accomplished scholar have in common with a ditch-digger?

Although it is true that common ground helps people build relationships, Judaism rejects the

hierarchical underpinnings of this idea. The Torah says of Moses that he was the greatest prophet who ever lived (Deut. 34:10), and also that he was the humblest person on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3). These seem like contradictory statements. Didn't Moses realize he towered over everyone else? How could he be humble?

The Tiferet Shmuel explains that, although Moses recognized his unique capabilities, he viewed everyone within the context of their circumstances. When meeting an average person, Moses would think, "Perhaps the five minutes of Torah learning that this water carrier squeezes into the end of his exhausting day are more precious to G-d than all my achievements!" In this way, Moses maintained his humility. This is exactly Maimonides' point that we mentioned earlier-that G-d evaluates the effort it takes to perform a mitzvah. There is no way for us to know whose effort is worth more or less. Every learned person must try to adopt Moses's attitude of humility, and think, "Perhaps this simple, ordinary person is actually greater than me in G-d's eyes. Perhaps his effort is worth more."

The Tiferet Shmuel thus understands the command, "Love your fellow as yourself," to be addressing the leaders and scholars. G-d tells them, "Love everyone-even average people-as yourself." If the scholar claims that such love is impossible because of the vast differences between him and the average person, G-d concludes the command with the words, "I am G-d"- in other words, "I am the one who assigns reward." Why should the scholar assume that he is on a higher level than the average person? The average person might be equal or greater because of the effort he invested!

This answers our first question. The verse, "Love your fellow as yourself" does not conclude with the words, "I am G-d" in order to identify G-d as the source of the mitzvah. Rather, these words teach us that G-d can be trusted and believed to reward people according to their effort. This also answers our second question. Rebbe Akiva is not rating or ranking this mitzvah. Rather, his statement must be read as follows: Zeh klal... Gadol b'Torah. In other words, "This principle [is intended for those who are] great in Torah"! The principle "Love your fellow as yourself" is especially relevant to those great scholars who might be tempted to think that they have little in common with the average person.

May we all be blessed to make a shift in our thinking and approach each person we meet with the thought, "How would I fare if I were in his shoes?" May we merit to see the atmosphere of camaraderie and love that will arise from this perspective, and may we thus deserve to experience the world coming full circle and returning to its state of paradise. © 2008 Rabbi A. Wagensberg and aish.com