

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

At the centre of the mosaic books is Vayikra. At the centre of Vayikra is the "holiness code" (chapter 19) with its momentous call: "You shall be holy because I, the Lord your G-d, am holy." And at the centre of chapter 19 is a brief paragraph which, by its positioning, is the apex, the high point, of the Torah: "Do not hate your brother in your heart; You must surely admonish your neighbour and not bear sin because of him. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. Love your neighbour as yourself. I am G-d." (19:17-18)

I want, in this study, to examine the second of these provisions: "You must surely admonish your neighbour and not bear sin because of him."

Rambam and Ramban agree in seeing two quite different levels of meaning in this sentence. This is how Rambam puts it: "When one person sins against another, the latter should not hate him and remain silent. As it is said about the wicked: 'And Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor evil, although Absalom hated Amnon.' Rather, he is commanded to speak to him and to say to him, 'Why did you do such-and-such to me? Why did you sin against me in such-and-such a matter?' As it is said, 'You must surely admonish your neighbour.' If he repents and requests forgiveness from him, he must forgive and not be cruel, as it is said, 'And Abraham prayed to G-d..'

"If someone sees his fellow committing a sin or embarking on a path that is not good, it is a commandment to make him return to the good and to make known to him that he is sinning against himself by his evil actions, as it is said, 'You must surely admonish your neighbour'..."

Likewise, Ramban: "'You shall surely remonstrate with your neighbour' -- this is a separate command, namely that we must teach him the reproof of instruction. 'And not bear sin because of him' -- for you will bear sin because of his transgression if you do not rebuke him..."

"However, it seems to me that the correct interpretation is that the expression 'you shall surely remonstrate' is to be understood in the same way as 'And Abraham remonstrated with Avimelekh'. The verse is thus saying: 'Do not hate your brother in your heart when he does something to you against your will, but

instead you should remonstrate with him, saying, 'Why did you do this to me?' and you will not bear sin because of him by covering up your hatred in your heart and not telling him, for when you remonstrate with him, he will justify himself before you or he will regret his action and admit his sin, and you will forgive him."

The difference between the two interpretations is that one is social, the other interpersonal. On Rambam's second and Ramban's first reading, the command is about collective responsibility. When we see a fellow Jew about to commit a sin, we must try to persuade him not to do so. We are not allowed to say, "That is a private matter between him and G-d." "All Israel," said the sages, "are sureties for one another." We are each responsible, not only for our own conduct, but for the behaviour of others. That is a major chapter in Jewish law and thought.

However, both Rambam and Ramban are aware that this is not the plain sense of the text. Taken in context, what we have before us is a subtle account of the psychology of interpersonal relations.

Judaism has sometimes been accused by Christianity of being about justice rather than love ("You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"). This is entirely untrue. There is a wonderful teaching in Avot deRabbi Natan: "Who is the greatest hero? One who turns an enemy into a friend." What sets the Torah apart is its understanding of the psychology of hatred.

If someone has done us harm, it is natural to feel aggrieved. What then are we to do in order to fulfil the command, "Do not hate your brother in your heart"? The Torah's answer is: Speak. Converse. Challenge. Remonstrate. It may be that the other person had a good reason for doing what he did. Or it may be that he was acting out of malice, in which case our remonstrations will give him, if he so chooses, the opportunity to apologise, and we should then forgive him. In either case, talking it through is the best way of restoring a broken relationship. Once again we encounter here one of the leitmotifs of Judaism: the power of speech to create, sustain and mend relationships.

Maimonides cites a key proof-text. The story is told (2 Samuel 13) of how Amnon, one of King David's children, raped his half-sister Tamar. When Absalom, Tamar's brother, hears about the episode, his reaction seems on the face of it irenic, serene:

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"Her brother Absalom said to her, 'Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet, now my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart.' And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman. When King David heard all this, he was furious. Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad..."

Appearances, however, deceive. Absalom is anything but forgiving. He waits for two years, and then invites Amnon to a festive meal at sheep-shearing time. He gives instructions to his men: "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him." And so it happened. Absalom's silence was not the silence of forgiveness but of hate -- the hate of which Pierre de LaClos spoke in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* when he wrote the famous line: "Revenge is a dish best served cold."

There is another equally powerful example in Bereishith: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age, and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him (velo yachlu dabro leshalom, literally, 'they could not speak with him to peace')."

On this, R. Jonathan Eybeschuetz (c. 1690-1764) comments: "Had they been able to sit together as a group, they would have spoken to one another and remonstrated with each other, and would eventually have made their peace with one another. The tragedy of conflict is that it prevents people from talking together and listening to one another." A failure to communicate is often the prelude to revenge.

The inner logic of the two verses in our sedra is therefore this: "Love your neighbour as yourself. But not all neighbours are loveable. There are those who, out of envy or malice, have done you harm. I do not therefore command you to live as if you were angels, without any of the emotions natural to human beings. I do however forbid you to hate. That is why, when someone does you wrong, you must confront the wrongdoer. You must tell him of your feelings of hurt and distress. It may be that you completely misunderstood his intentions. Or it may be that he genuinely meant to do you harm, but now, faced with the reality of the injury he has done you, he may sincerely repent of what he did. If, however, you fail to talk it through, there is a real possibility that you

will bear a grudge and in the fullness of time, come to take revenge -- as did Absalom."

What is so impressive about the Torah is that it both articulates the highest of high ideals, and at the same time speaks to us as human beings. If we were angels it would be easy to love one another. But we are not. An ethic that commands us to love our enemies, without any hint as to how we are to achieve this, is simply unliveable. Instead, the Torah sets out a realistic programme. By being honest with one another, talking things through, we may be able to achieve reconciliation -- not always, to be sure, but often. How much distress and even bloodshed might be spared if humanity heeded this simple command. © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely instruct your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him." (Leviticus 19:17)

Soon after my aliya, I took a bus through downtown Jerusalem. I didn't particularly notice a young woman in the back of the bus who sat down next to a pious-looking haredi man. He, in his black hat, black coat and long beard, and she, in her sandals, skirt and sleeveless top were part of a typical Jerusalem scene.

When the young woman quietly asked the man to close the window, he turned to her rather matter-of-factly with the words, "Would you please lengthen your sleeves?"

"Mister," the woman said, her voice rising to match her indignation, "the open window is bothering me!" "Madam, your bare arms are bothering me," he responded.

Her face was now grim and determined as she shouted, "Are they my arms or your arms?" My stop was approaching and I was running late for a meeting, but I was also desperate to hear the outcome of this confrontation, and almost everyone on the bus, including the driver, voiced their position for or against the woman.

No one on the bus argued from a practical perspective - how could she lengthen her sleeves even if she wanted to? I, for one, found the intellectual and emotional exchange exhilarating until I overheard a man behind me cry hysterically to his wife, "I told you we have to leave the country. When they are in control, they will demand total religious conformity from all of us."

By the time I got off the bus, the window had not been closed nor had the sleeves been lengthened. Still, for the first time, I began to sense the passion of secular Jews in Israel who are frightened of the future and view the growing religious trend as a movement toward repression and persecution. This incident wasn't

just another disagreement; it was part of a conflict that threatens to tear apart our nation.

The standard liberal position would regard the haredi man in this incident as the villain, but what would be the position of our Jewish tradition? The verse cited above, "You shall surely instruct your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him," seems to be a scriptural imperative.

Maimonides formulates the law "One who sees his friend sinning or following an improper path is commanded to restore him to the proper way of life.... Anyone who is able to instruct and does not do so becomes responsible for the sin of his friend." (Laws of Proper Opinions 6,7). It seems that the haredi man did exactly what he was supposed to do! A closer look at the texts, however, reveals a different reality. The Talmud (B.T. Yebamot65b) states, "Just as one is commanded to say that which will be obeyed, so is one commanded not to say that which will not be obeyed."

Maimonides teaches: "Should you rebuke someone to the point that his face changes color? The Torah states: 'You should not bear a sin because of him'" (ibid).

Maimonides is teaching us that you must be certain that your manner of reproach will not cause you to sin, by publicly shaming someone and by turning them even farther away from Judaism. Fascinatingly, the Vilna Gaon teaches that if someone declares himself to be a non-observant Jew, it is forbidden to attempt to instruct him because you will most likely alienate him even farther from our tradition (Shulhan Aruch Orah Haim 608, Biyur Halacha).

Let me briefly recount an incident that illustrates the proper way to instruct. Soon after my aliya, I conducted a seminar for 25 non-observant families on the topic of Shabbat. In the aftermath of the seminar, many of the children were switched from secular to religious schools. The success of the seminar was not due to the presenters but rather to two participants, a husband and wife, who were both professors. They were deeply moved by all the learning, and after the seminar, they hosted a weekly class in their home, which the entire group enthusiastically attended. When I met with them to thank them, I asked what had initially caused them to respond to our ad.

They told me that they lived in a small apartment building in Ramat Gan whose inhabitants were all secular, except for one observant family. That family never complained when people held loud parties on Shabbat. Instead, they were always warm and friendly to everyone. On Friday nights, they kept the door of their apartment open. As the delicious aroma of the food and the sounds of their singing wafted through the building, children started gathering at the open doorway. The family welcomed them in, and soon adults followed and they, too, were warmly welcomed into the apartment.

"We were moved to tears when we saw our neighbors bless their sons and heard them singing together around the table," the wife told me. "So when your advertisement appeared in the newspaper, my husband and I were more than ready to hear about the Sabbath and its observance." ©2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

To a great extent, reaction to defeat and tragedy is the true defining moment of one's inner strength and faith. Aharon's silence in the face of the loss of his two older sons is reckoned in Jewish tradition as an act of nobility and sublime acceptance of the unfathomable judgment of Heaven.

Contrast Aharon's silence and humble acceptance of fate with the response of Iyov to his troubles and tragedies. Iyov has a great deal to say, to complain against, to bitterly question and to debate almost endlessly with his companions and visitors as to the unfairness of what has befallen him.

To the human eye, we are all aware that life and its events are often unfair. There is no one that I am aware of that has successfully "explained" the Holocaust. So it seems that we are faced with two diametrically opposed choices as to the proper response to mindless fate and tragedy. Are we to remain mute and silent or are we to rail against the arrogant fate that has brought misfortune to us?

The Torah does not seem to inform us about this and in fact, as shown above, apparently even contradicts itself regarding this continually recurring facet of human existence. Yet the Torah and all of the books that it contains is one seamless whole, and the seeming contradictions lie within us and not within its holy words and exalted ideas. Thus we are brought to study this matter with greater introspection and with less judgment and personal bias.

I think that the Torah means to teach us that there is no one correct, one-size-fits-all response to the failures and tragedies of life. Aharon is correct in his response to inexplicable tragedy and so is Iyov. King Solomon correctly noted that there is a time for silence and a time for speech. So too there are people for whom mute silence is the proper response to tragedy and there are people who must give expression to their feelings of grief and frustration by words, debate and even complaint.

In most instances the rabbis of the Talmud voted for silence over speech and acceptance of one's fate over complaint and public debate. Yet the rabbis did not exclude the book of Iyov from the biblical canon of holy books. In that act of inclusion they allowed for varying degrees of response to troubles and travail.

Iyov also has a place in the pantheon of heroic human views regarding tragic events. Within limits and

with a faith-based attitude one can question and complain, express wonderment and even somehow demand answers. But, deep down, all humans understand that they cannot fathom Heaven's wisdom, decisions and the individual fate that is visited upon us all. So the death of Aharon's sons serves as a template for life, a lesson for all of us. © 2013 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

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached G-d and they died" (Vayikra 16:1). The death of Aharon's sons is mentioned twice in this verse, even though the same information could have been relayed by referencing it only once ("and G-d spoke to Moshe after Aharon's two sons died when they approached G-d"). Why is their death referred to twice in the same verse if one would have sufficed?

Netziv points out that when someone is guilty of a sin that is punishable by death, their death is usually not immediate, thereby giving the sinner time to repent. In this case, however, Aharon's sons died right away, because their sin was done in the inner sanctum of the Mishkan, "before G-d." The second reference to their death is part of one clause, telling us that "they died on the spot (rather than after some time had passed) since their sin was done when they approached G-d." Nevertheless, why was this point made here, before the Yom Kippur service is described, rather than in the narrative about Nadav and Avihu's death?

The obvious connection is that the next verse (16:2) includes a warning for Aharon (and, by extension, every Kohain Gadol after him) not to enter the inner sanctum of the Mishkan (or Temple) at will; only on the prescribed days (Yom Kippur), after doing the necessary Temple service (bringing the Yom Kippur offerings, including the incense offering). The punishment for not following these instructions is death, and G-d reminded Moshe that since this transgression would occur "before G-d," in the inner sanctum, it would be enacted immediately, as had occurred with Aharon's sons. A closer look at Rashi (on 16:2) may add another dimension to this connection.

When Moshe is told to warn Aharon "not to enter the holy, inside the curtain, in front of the ark's covering (referring to the Kodesh HaKadashim, the Mishkan's inner sanctum) whenever he wants so that he should not die," an explanatory clause is given; "for in a cloud I will appear upon the [ark's] covering." Rashi explains this clause to be saying "for I constantly appear there with the pillar of My cloud; and since My presence manifests itself there, he should be careful not to

become accustomed to coming [inside]." Although Rashi includes G-d's "cloud pillar" because the verse mentions G-d's cloud, the way Rashi explains it makes its inclusion seem unnecessary. The point is that G-d's presence dwells within the inner sanctum, so Aharon can't just come in anytime he wants; that G-d's divine presence is accompanied by, or covered by, G-d's cloud, should be irrelevant. Additionally, the verse doesn't mention the "cloud pillar," only the "cloud;" why does Rashi add the "pillar" aspect?

Although numerous commentators on Rashi say that the divine presence was always in the Mishkan (between the K'ruvim that were on the cover of the ark in the inner sanctum), I am not convinced this was so. For one thing, when our sages, of blessed memory, used an analogy to describe why G-d commanded us to build a Mishkan for Him (Sh'mos Rabbah 33:1), they compared His giving us the Torah to a king's only daughter marrying another king (or prince). The king knew he couldn't make his new son-in-law live with him, so asked that living space be built for him in his son-in-law's country, thereby enabling the king to visit his daughter anytime he wanted to. The king obviously wouldn't permanently move out of his own country to reside in his son-in-law's country; he only wanted to be able to drop by whenever he wanted without having to first make reservations. If this is analogous to G-d asking us to build a Mishkan for Him, it would similarly be so that His divine presence could join us whenever it was appropriate, not that He would abandon His heavenly abode and live with us permanently. Additionally, the "cloud pillar" was where G-d resided when His presence was made noticeable (see Sh'mos 13:21), and what descended when G-d wanted to speak to Moshe (see Sh'mos 33:9-11). If G-d's divine presence always resided in the Mishkan, His "cloud pillar" wouldn't need to "descend" or suddenly "appear;" it would already be there. Yet, there are several instances where G-d's "cloud pillar" either "appeared" or "descended" before G-d spoke (see Bamidbar 12:5 and D'varim 31:15; see also Bamidbar 11:25, 17:7 and 20:6). The very notion that G-d had to specify that He would speak to Moshe "from between the K'ruvim that are on the Kapores" (Sh'mos 25:22) implies that G-d wasn't always there, or it would be obvious where G-d's "voice" would emanate from (see Bamidbar 7:89; see also 30:6, where the implication is that G-d will meet Moshe there, not that He was already there). The verses (Sh'mos 40:34-38) are rather explicit that G-d's divine presence rested on/over the Mishkan in its entirety; it would seem that the "cloud pillar" descending from "G-d's cloud" to reside in the inner sanctum was not a constant. This is implicit in Rashi's wording as well; he doesn't say "since My presence constantly manifests itself there," but "for I constantly appear there with the pillar of My cloud," indicating that what was "constant" was not G-d's divine presence being in the

inner sanctum, but that whenever His presence was there, it was within His "cloud pillar."

If G-d's divine presence wasn't always manifest in the inner sanctum, and whenever it was, it was within His "cloud pillar," there would be an easy way to tell if G-d's presence had descended into the inner sanctum-seeing His "cloud pillar!" In essence, G-d's "cloud pillar" was like a giant "do not disturb" sign; G-d was in there, and unless He called for you or it was time for the Yom Kippur service, you better stay out! And if there was an easy way to know whether or not G-d was in the Mishkan's inner sanctum, one might think that when it was empty, there would be no problem going in. When G-d told Moshe to tell Aharon that he can't just enter the inner sanctum anytime he wants to, He didn't mean "only when I'm there," but anytime, even if G-d wasn't there. Since G-d's divine presence does descend there, and it might do so after Aharon had checked that His "cloud pillar" wasn't there, he has to stay out even if there had been no "cloud pillar" before he started to enter. In other words, to avoid the dangerous possibility that G-d would enter the Mishkan's inner sanctum at the same moment that Aharon did, entrance was forbidden even if there was no "cloud pillar."

"And a fire went out from before G-d and consumed." What did it consume? The first time these words appear in the Torah (Vayikra 9:24), it consumed the offerings that were on the altar. The second time these same exact words appear (10:2, two verses later), it consumed Nadav and Avihu. Rashbam says there weren't two different fires; it was one heavenly fire that descended into the inner sanctum of the Mishkan and then exited through the Mishkan's doorway to the courtyard, where it consumed the offerings on the altar. Unfortunately, Nadav and Avihu were inside the Mishkan at the time, and were consumed by the fire as it went from inside the Mishkan to the courtyard. Their unauthorized entrance, done before G-d's divine presence had descended onto/into the Mishkan, led to their deaths because they were inside when G-d entered. The fact that G-d had not been there when they started to go in did not matter.

"And G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached G-d and they died." The first mention of their deaths is a chronological reference; this conversation occurred after they had died. The second reference describes why they died, as they "they approached G-d," even though G-d wasn't in the Mishkan when they "approached." There was a precedent to entering a then-empty inner sanctum to find that G-d entered afterwards, with disastrous consequences. After reminding Moshe about the circumstances under which Nadav and Avihu had died, G-d told him to tell Aharon that he shouldn't enter the inner sanctum whenever he wants either, even if there was no "cloud pillar," as there was no guarantee that G-d wouldn't descend after he had already entered. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why were Nadav and Avihu, two of Aharon's (Aaron) sons killed? The Torah states their death came when they brought an eish zarah, a foreign fire, into the Temple. (Leviticus 10:1) But what was the nature of this fire?

Some maintain that because the prohibition against drinking is found in the sentences that follow their death, (Leviticus 10:9) the fire alludes to the possibility that Aharon's sons served in the sanctuary while intoxicated. This may be the reason for the punishment of death.

Others insist that the fire relates to their being "hot" in deciding halakhic matters themselves without consulting Moshe (Moses). Note that the preceding sentence (Leviticus 9:23) stresses the leadership role of Moshe and Aharon.

I am convinced that when many answers are offered, it indicates that none are truly compelling. It can be suggested that we cannot comprehend the reason why Nadav and Avihu's actions were deserving of death. Only God can grasp the unfathomable, we cannot.

This may explain why the Torah tells us at the beginning of this week's portion, that the Lord spoke to Moshe immediately after the death of Aharon's two sons. (Leviticus 16:1) The lesson: despite the suffering of sufferings, the horror of an untimely ghastly death, dialogue continues. God tells Moshe to speak to Aharon and Aharon does God's will. In fact this may be the central point of the Nadav - Avihu story. Although not understanding why his sons died, Aharon and the priesthood continue on in a relationship to God.

Not coincidentally, soon after the first sentence of our portion, Aharon the high priest is commanded to select two identical goats and, by lots, designate one as an offering to God and the other to be pushed over the cliff for Azazel. (Leviticus 16:6-11) It is extraordinary that although these goats are identical in every way, they experience different fates. This to teach Aharon and all of us that sometimes life takes tragic twists and turns that are inexplicable.

When confronted with such inexplicable suffering we ought all remember the words of Esther Wachsman, mother of Nachshon (the young Israeli soldier murdered by Arab terrorists a number of years ago). She said, "When tragedy befalls us we should not ask 'why?' but rather, 'what shall we do now?'" It is our choice whether to approach our tragedy by only crying 'woe is me' or whether to allow it to elevate us, giving our lives new meaning and direction and bringing us closer to God.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik makes this very point when distinguishing between "fate" and "destiny." Fate casts each of us into a dimension of life we cannot

control. Destiny, on the other hand, "is an active existence in which humanity confronts the environment into which she or he was cast...Humanity's mission in this world is to turn fate into destiny, an existence that is passive and influenced to an existence that is active and influential." © 2013 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 DAVID LAPIN

Character Before Wisdom

One of my greatest learning and teaching challenges is to be vigilant about seeing and showing the world through the lens of a pure, authentic Torah Hashkafa (worldview) and not one tainted by secularity.

The lenses through which we see the world determine not only how we experience it but also how we respond to it and to the events of our lives. A person who has become embittered or who is simply prejudiced from experiences with, say a certain ethnic or gender group, will often experience these groups in negative ways and respond to them from that negative perspective. He or she will interpret everything members of these groups do or say in the light of the lenses through which they see them. An atheist sees the world and interprets events through godless lenses and a ma'amin (one who believes in Hashem) sees it through a lens of faith.

The challenge is not just the secular perspective through which we see and interpret the world. The problem is that we often use our secularized lenses to see and interpret the Torah too. It is not only "secular people" who are limited by their secularity. The effect of the media, the Internet and the conversation of the masses that often includes Benei Torah, skew our sights and color our lenses without our even noticing it.

Consider the example of how we view the study of Torah. From a secular viewpoint we regard a person as an expert in a field if he or she has mastered a body of knowledge and has published and achieved recognition in the field. Their character is not a factor in evaluating their expertise. In Torah however, there is another dimension to expertise apart from mastery and professional recognition: character.

Rabeinu Yonah, one of the most authoritative commentators on Pirkei Avos (3:17), says on the Mishna: Im ein derech erez, ein Torah ("If there is no character there can be no Torah,") that "before studying the Torah a person should refine himself with good character because the Torah cannot possibly dwell in an individual who is not of fine character."

Rabeinu Yonah's axiom underpins the Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 81:2) about R' Levi ben Sissi who was unable to answer three simple halachik questions because, in his own words, he became momentarily

enamored with the considerable honor shown to him by the community that had just appointed him their rabbi. (See R' Yerucham Leibowitz, Da'as Chochma uMusal, P 54.)

This idea that even a fleeting feeling of arrogance can annihilate an individual's access to Torah that he knows well is an idea foreign to the mastery of other subjects. This is because Torah is not a body of static information that resides in books. Torah is the dynamic transmission of Divine energy and powerful insight from Hashem through generations of saintly sages. Character, as Rabeinu Yonah says, is the human condition necessary for the effective transmission of the Torah. Without character an individual might have access to information, but not to the wisdom and energy of Torah insight.

For Torah to be authentic it needs to be absorbed into the fabric of an individual's identity and personality before he can transmit it further to others. This is the idea expressed in the opening of Pirkei Avos: "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai..." He received it into his being, and only then did he pass it on to Yehoshua and the Zekeinim. If Moshe's character was flawed then the Torah he taught would have been contaminated and would have been void of authenticity.

The implications of this principle are far-reaching: When someone of poor character studies the Torah or expounds on it, the ideas they learn or expound can not be considered to be authentic Torah. Unlike other studies, the authenticity of Torah is determined not only by the accuracy of the material but also by the character of the student or teacher. Torah has kedusha (sanctity) and therefore unlike other studies it requires kedusha in its study, understanding and teaching. In the same way, the sanctity of the Beis Hamikdash (Temple) or Mishkan (Tabernacle) required that those who served in them were people of great character and holiness.

The sons of Ahron who die at the beginning of Achareimos are another example of how a tiny character flaw can contaminate the sanctity of Temple service. The slight arrogance they showed by offering halachik opinions in the presence of their teacher, Moshe, was enough to deem the fire they used for their offerings, an eish zarah -- a foreign fire. The flaw was not in the object, the fire, it was in the subject, the sons of Ahron. In the same way Torah that is learnt or taught by people of flawed character is not authentic Torah. This is not because of a flaw in the object, the text. It is because of a flaw in the character of the subject learning and teaching that Torah.

At the end of Achareimos we have yet another example of how the quality of people's actions and character can contaminate a holy object. In Vayikra 18:24-28 we learn how the Land of Israel can be polluted and contaminated by immoral activity on the part of its subjects. This moral pollution has led and can in the future lead to the expulsion of entire peoples from

the Land, including our own people. Personal stature, moral caliber and greatness of character are not luxuries in the Jewish personality. Musar, the study and practice of character refinement, is not an ancillary to Torah study. Musar is a precondition to the study of Torah. Character is a precondition for the authenticity and sustainability of our national and spiritual identities.

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RABBI AVI HELLER

Weekly Dose of Torah

I once had a conversation with a group of young Jewish activists about what it means to be a role model and if they were – in fact – role models. They were very reluctant to accept the idea that they were role models, unwilling to say that anyone should try to be like them, and hesitant to declare that their way was “right”. They seemed to view saying that as a sort of arrogance. Also, I think they were not comfortable enough in their own skins to defend their life choices or to declare themselves as role models, as if they were throwing stones from glass houses. On the other hand, it was not necessarily their choice; whether they liked it or not, people viewed them as role models. On some level, they had accepted that role, or they wouldn’t have been sitting there talking to me in the first place.

There was a time in my life when I was not a rabbi (and did not plan on being a rabbi; story for another time) but I always felt that wearing a kippa (as an example) was part of my identity and my principles. By wearing that kippa – on my college campus, at my job, in the street – I was automatically the spokesman for Judaism. Even if – and when – I didn’t want to be. But I didn’t want to take the kippa off, either. I don’t think that I am always a perfect person, but that does not absolve me from being a role model to my children. There are times when I feel unworthy of my title or my own expectations, but I am still a role model to my students, to my doormen, to my neighbors. We have to choose our roles; but then we don’t always get to choose if we are seen as models of those roles, walking down the runways of our identity for everyone to see.

In the starring role in this week’s Torah portion of Acharei Mot is Aaron the high priest, the kohen gadol. As he transitions from Moshe’s brother to the most important spiritual personality in the Jewish people, he is up-front and center, in the spotlight. Our sidra describes the day of Yom Kippur, which is the most prominent day of the kohen gadol’s career. On this day, he does all of the sacrificial labor, enters into the Holy of Holies, stands before God as representative and confessor for the Jewish people, all so that God will forgive the Jewish people all their sins.¹ He is the hero

and role model of the Jews always, but especially on this holiest of days.

On Yom Kippur, the kohen gadol would make three confessions of sin. One, for him and his wife (Leviticus 16:11). Two, for all the kohanim, the sons of Aaron (16:17.) Three, for all the Jewish people (16:24). In widening concentric circles, he first asked for atonement for himself and then for all his brothers and sisters, the whole nation of Israel. Tradition has it that – when and if the sins were forgiven², a crimson string tied to the sanctuary door would turn white.

I have two questions:

a) Is Aaron a role model? After all, he is the holiest Jew ever; no ordinary person can ever aspire to be like Aaron. Shouldn’t a role model be modeling a role that is within reach, that someone could reasonably expect to emulate?

b) How can Aaron do teshuva (repentance) on behalf of other people? Like all individual mitzvot (commandments), shouldn’t each individual Jew have to seek their own atonement directly from God? As opposed to Christianity, Jews do not place intermediaries between the human and the divine.

In regard to the first question, I think that there are two kinds of role models and that both are important. We need to have gedolim, i.e. great towering personalities – like Rabbi Soloveichik, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rav Kook³ -- who show us what is possible, what a human being truly connected to Torah can be. But we also need humbler role models – whether it is a local rabbi or an honest businessman and simple Jew – that we can aspire to in our lives. I believe that Aaron was fulfilling both roles; on the one hand, he was displaying true leadership, by shouldering the burden of the entire nation and asking for atonement from Hashem. On the other, he was role-modeling in a way that every Jew could emulate. Which brings us to the second question.

It is true that the High Priest had a special role on Yom Kippur as a figure of atonement. But the message that he was imparting to the Jewish people was also one of leading by example. In other words, Even though he was an unapproachable tzaddik the likes of which you and I could never be, he could still be a role model for us as well. The act of confessing his own sins show this. He was establishing a priority and an expectation for all the Jewish people to do. Just like politicians vote and pay taxes – because that’s what everyone is supposed to do – so too (l’havdil⁴) the kohen gadol was showing that everyone has to do teshuva (repentance). Even the High Priest has sins for which he repents; none of us should feel too high or too low to do the same.

His second message is that everyone must keep the entire people of Israel in mind on Yom Kippur, not just themselves. Rav Avigdor Nevenzahl (chief rabbi of the old city of Jerusalem, who we met with on last year’s MJE Israel trip) says that his confessions on Yom

¹ If you want to consider all the things we lack in modern-day Judaism, the fact that we have no kohen gadol to stand before God for us on Yom Kippur is a good place to start.

Kippur teach achdut, that all the Jewish people are united as one. We all have each other's backs. The act of confessing for his kohen brothers and for all the Jewish people shows him as a role model as well, modeling that we pray not just for ourselves, but for others as well. Our prayers are acts of community, not selfishness.

We may not be high priests, but we are all role models to someone, as human beings and as Jews. Even if we are not perfect, we must be mindful of the messages we convey to others and keep all our brothers and sisters, the whole house of Israel, in our minds and hearts. Shabbat shalom! ©2012 Rabbi A. Heller & The Manhattan Jewish Experience

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In our double parashah, we read about both Yom Kippur and Shabbat. R' Moshe Yechiel Halevi Epstein z"l (1890-1971; the Ozhorover Rebbe in New York and Bnei Brak) writes: There are many similarities between Yom Ha'kippurim and Shabbat. Both are days of atonement. [The connection between Yom Kippur and atonement is well-known.] Regarding Shabbat, the Gemara (Shabbat 119b) teaches: If one prays on Friday night and recites "Vy'chulu," the two angels who accompany a person place their hands on his head, and say (Yeshayah 6:7), "Your iniquity has gone away and your sin shall be atoned for." The Gemara (Shabbat 118b) also states: If one observes Shabbat according to its law, even if he is an idolator like the generation of Enosh, he is forgiven.

In the zemirot for motzaei Shabbat we say, "He Who separates between holy and secular, may He forgive our sins." At first glance, it is difficult to see what connection this request has to Shabbat. [For this reason, some suggest that this zemer was intended to be sung on motzaei Yom Kippur.] The Ozhorover Rebbe explains, however, that because Shabbat is a day of atonement, yet it is forbidden to mar the joy of the day by mentioning sin, therefore we make this request on motzaei Shabbat.

Nevertheless, the Ozhorover Rebbe continues, there is a difference between Shabbat and Yom Ha'kippurim. On the latter, we attain atonement through active teshuvah / repentance. We are required to deprive ourselves of food, drink and certain other pleasures. And, in the time of the Bet Hamikdash, the kohen gadol brought many special sacrifices. In contrast, the atonement that we obtain on Shabbat is incidental to the holiness of the day. We do not need to do anything special to obtain it other than to observe Shabbat properly. (Esh Dat Vol. VIII p.521)

"He shall don a sacred linen tunic; linen breeches shall be on his flesh, he shall gird himself with a linen sash, and cover his head with a linen turban."

(16:4) When the Kohen Gadol enters the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, he does not wear the usual "uniform" of the Kohen Gadol; rather, he wears all-white linen garments. The reason, say our Sages, is that the everyday garments of the Kohen Gadol contain gold, which is reminiscent of the sin of the golden calf. Wearing them would violate the principle: "Ain kategor na'aseh saneigor" / "A prosecutor [i.e., gold] may not become an advocate for the defense."

R' Moshe Leib Shachor z"l (Yerushalayim; 1894-1964) notes that this principle was not derived by our Sages from any verse. Rather, it's a matter of decency; one person shouldn't be prosecuting another unless he is certain in the depths of his heart of the latter's guilt. How then could a prosecutor ever switch sides?! Furthermore, even if the prosecutor now doubts his former certainty and believes the accused is innocent, the lingering vestiges of his past beliefs will limit his effectiveness as a defense counsel. That is human nature. [While these concerns don't literally apply to the Kohen Gadol's garments, the Torah did not "design" the avodah / Temple service in a way that violates principles of decent behavior.]

How does a person become an effective spokesman for the defense of the Jewish People or in defense of individual sinners? R' Shachor writes: One can be an effective advocate if he has previously been in the shoes of the person for whom he is advocating. If he has overcome certain bad traits, he understands the other person's challenges and feels his pain.

Alternatively, an effective advocate is someone who appreciates the beauty and unity of Creation as a whole and therefore values each of its separate parts. He knows that nothing in the Universe lacks a purpose; therefore, he feels obligated to advocate for every person. (Koach Ha'teshuvah p.20)

"Speak to the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your Elokim.'" (19:2) R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; Spain and Eretz Yisrael; 1194-1270) writes: After the Torah has commanded us regarding kashrut, prohibited relations, etc., a person still could be a glutton or a drunkard within the confines of the law. Thus, the Torah commands, "You shall be holy," i.e., you shall refrain from excess pleasures even when they are permitted by halachah. (Ramban Al Ha'Torah)

R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi z"l (1745-1812; first Lubavitcher Rebbe) writes: This holiness is not an all or nothing proposition. If a person subdues his urges even briefly, for example, by delaying his meal for a short time and studying Torah during those minutes, or if one conquers his urge to engage in idle chatter even for a short time, that, too, is a form of holiness. As a result of even that small measure of holiness, a person can expect a great deal of Divine assistance in serving Hashem. (Likkutei Amarim Tanya, ch.27) © 2013 S. Katz & torah.org