

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

not wrong a stranger or oppress him" (Ex. 22:20). Here the Torah speaks not of justice but of love.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist, has recently become one of the most prominent public intellectuals of our time. His recent book *Twelve Rules*



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for Life, has been a massive best-seller in Britain and America. He has had the courage to be a contrarian, challenging the fashionable fallacies of the contemporary West. Particularly striking in the book is Rule 5: "Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them."

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

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

The result is that they leave their children dangerously unprepared for a world that will not indulge their wishes or desire for attention; a world that can be tough, demanding and sometimes cruel. Without rules, social skills, self-restraints and a capacity to defer gratification, children grow up without an apprenticeship in reality. His conclusion is powerful: Clear rules make for secure children and calm, rational parents. Clear principles of discipline and punishment balance mercy and justice so that social development and psychological maturity can be optimally promoted. Clear rules and proper discipline help the child, and the family, and society, establish, maintain and expand order. That is all that protects us from chaos.

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

unsuccessful, unfulfilled adult life.

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

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

Hence the life-changing idea that we have forgotten for far too long: Love is not enough. Relationships need rules. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You must surely instruct your colleague, so that you not bear the brunt of his sin" (Lev. 19:17).

Judaism teaches us that "every Israelite is responsible for the other." Except for the State of Israel, where the Jewish population continues to grow, Jews in the rest of the world suffer from internal "hemorrhaging."

How do we "inspire" our Jewish siblings so that they remain within -- or return to -- our Jewish peoplehood? 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 sefira, a word pregnant with meaning. Its root noun is the Hebrew sappir, which is the dazzling blue -- as the Bible records immediately following the Revelation at Sinai: "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and

Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel then went up. And they saw the God 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" (Ex. 24: 9-10).

From this perspective, the days of our counting are a period of spiritual growth and development, of a connection between Passover and Shavuot. But when and how does this spiritual journey begin? It begins with Passover, God's encounter with His nation Israel at its conception. And the Hebrew *sefira* (counting/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 (*haggada*, telling a story) your child on that day saying..." (Ex. 13:8) The Israelites came into Egypt as a family, the seventy descendants of Jacob. Hence the recounting of the story of our enslavement and eventual redemption is the recounting of family history. A nation is a family writ large: in a family, there are familial memories of origins; in a family there is a sense of 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.

Eda is the biblical word for community (literally "witness"), and every community attempts to recreate a familial collegiality. The relationship within the family is largely horizontal (towards each other) rather than vertical (connected to a transcendent God). And familial rites of togetherness are largely governed by family customs rather than by a Divinely ordained legal code.

Most importantly in families – as well as communities – every individual counts (once again, *sefira*).

Passover is our family-centered, communal festival, at the beginning of our calendar, at the very outset of our history, at the early steps towards our *sefira* march. On that first Passover we had not yet received our Torah from God, and we had not yet entered our Promised Land.

The Passover Sacrifice (Ex. 12) emphasizes our willingness to sacrifice for our freedom from slavery—our sacrifice of the lamb which was a defiant act of rebellion against the idolatrous Egyptian slave-society—and it attests to our uncompromising belief in human freedom and redemption even before we became a faith ordained at Mount Sinai. In order for every person/community 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 close-knit nature of the

event.

The ticket of admission is that you consider yourself a member of the family and wish to be counted as such; this entitles you to an unconditional embrace of love and acceptance, to inclusion in the family of Israel.

The *rasha* (wicked child) of the Haggadah is the one who seems to exclude himself from the family – and even s/he is to be invited and included! How do we engage our unaffiliated 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 and national literature that 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. ©2018 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The book of Vayikra contains most of the mitzvot/commandments that appear in the Torah itself. Because of this, it contains relatively little narrative. Nevertheless, the number and quality of the commandments themselves demand our study and appreciation. The Torah apparently could have sufficed by itself by just saying "be a good person." In fact, this was the slogan of many Jews and even of Jewish institutions and organizations in the past who claimed that none of the ritual commandments were necessary if one just remained "a good person."

Of course, there was no unanimous opinion as to how to define who was a good person. The definitions varied from generation to generation and culture to culture. The henchmen of Joseph Stalin and perhaps even those of Adolf Hitler somehow justified every evil behavior in the belief that they were accomplishing some ultimate good that transcended the bothersome details of murder and genocide. The capacity of human beings to continually redefine good to fit any political agenda or current fad is truly limitless.

So, if it were not for the specific commandments of the Torah that have a defined, ultimate good for the Jewish people and for civilization generally over millennia, we would be at a loss to find any moral footing for our lives and behavior.

The Torah has always been the trees and the forest at one and the same time. It is the minute detail and a general pattern of behavior that represents the traditional view as to what makes up a good person. As is often the case, many humans double down on the details and minutia of rules to the exclusion of seeing the general pattern of behavior into which they must fit. And, on the other hand, we find those that only see the general moral pattern and ignore the detailed

instructions that give meaning and substance in daily life to this general moral pattern.

When we purchase a sophisticated piece of machinery we find that it always comes with detailed and sometimes very complicated instructions as to how this device is to be assembled, connected and installed. One may completely understand how the device works and what its ultimate benefit will be, but if one does not follow the instructions for installation, even as to its smallest detail, this device cannot be installed and will not work.

Without the detailed commandments, the general pattern of morality outlined in the Torah simply would never come into being. Jewish history attests to this. It would be unthinkable that the Torah would command us to be a Holy nation dedicated to the service of God and human beings without telling us how this was to be achieved. It would not have shipped that necessary device to us without including instructions for its use in our everyday lives. This I believe this is the primary message of the Torah reading of this week. ©2018 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In one of this week's portions, the Torah tells us that Aaron the High Priest, cast lots upon two goats, "one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel." (Leviticus 16:8)

Rashi explains the procedure as follows: "One goat he (Aaron) placed on his right hand, the other on his left. He then put both hands in the urn, took one lot in each hand and placed it upon the corresponding goat. One of the lots was inscribed 'for the Lord' and the other 'for Azazel.'" Ibn Ezra explains that Azazel was a height from which the goat was hurled.

Sforno argues that the goat inscribed "for the Lord" was sacrificed as an offering to atone for sins committed in connection with the Sanctuary. The goat sent away was meant to expiate the sins of the community. (Sforno, Leviticus 16:5)

Other explanations come to mind. It can be suggested that the lots teach us that there are aspects of life that are based purely on *mazal*. This doesn't mean that we do not have the power to precipitate change. What it does teach however, is that in life we all face a certain fate over which we have no control. The Talmud says it this way "life, children and sustenance are not dependant upon merit but on *mazal*." (Moed Katan 28a) No wonder we read about the lots on Yom Kippur, the day in which we recognize that there are elements of life that are only in the hands

of God.

The Talmud also notes that the goats were similar in appearance, height, size and value (Yoma 62 ab). Yet, a slight shift of Aaron's hand brought about different destinies for the goats—one to the Lord, the other to Azazel.

It has been noted that life is a game of inches. This is even true in the world of sports. For example, a hard ground ball to the short stop could result in a double play. Had the ball gone an inch to the left or right, the winning run could have been driven in. So, too, in worldly affairs. It is often the case that an infinitesimal amount can be the difference between life and death, between belief and heresy, between doing the right and wrong thing.

This may be the deepest message of the lots. The slightest movement could make the difference between heaven and earth, between being sent to the Lord and being cast to Azazel. ©2018 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 S. LEVIN

A Brother's Comfort

One of the delights in studying Torah is that one can come across an entire wealth of knowledge that is triggered by one word. This is an indication of the depth of the Torah and the worlds of ideas which spill from each word found therein. The Rabbis tell us that there are *shiv'im panim* l'Torah, seventy faces to the Torah, which means that we can approach the Torah from many different angles and each is a correct approach to take. This perspective can and will change as one gets older and has experienced more. At every time in one's life Hashem provides the means to find answers to our challenges gleaned from the Torah. The Torah is Hashem's means of communicating with each one of us individually as we each bring our own perspective to its words.

One of the most difficult times that a person can experience is the loss of someone who is dear to him. This loss is compounded when the loss is of one's child at any age. A child should not die before his parent. Our parshiot this week return to the death of Aharon's two older sons, Nadav and Avihu. The Ramban tells us that Hashem requires Moshe to issue a warning to his brother to be careful not to drink wine and strong drink before approaching Hashem but he must also approach Hashem only at the designated time, Yom Kippur. "And Hashem said to Moshe, speak to Aharon, achicha, your brother, that he should not come into the Sanctuary (the Holy) at all times, not within the dividing curtain (into the Holy of Holies), not in front of the covering which is on the Aron (Holy Ark),

that he should not die, for through the Cloud, I will appear above the covering (of the Aron).” We will not concentrate our discussion on the death of Aharon’s sons but instead on the aftermath and the instructions which followed. The key word which will be the center of our focus is the word *achicha*, your brother.

The Torah is a concise, perfect document, the word of Hashem. There can be no extra words in the Torah and every word serves a purpose. If there appears to be a discrepancy in this principle we automatically seek an explanation which will justify its inclusion in the Torah. In this case the discrepancy is glaring. There is no need to remind Moshe that Aharon is his brother. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that “by this addition of the nature of the relationship, the prohibition which follows applies not only to the person himself but extends to his whole family, to the Kohein Hediot (the regular Kohein) and the Kohein HaGadol (the chief Kohein or High Priest).” Here Hirsch is discussing the entry into the Kodesh (the Holy) and approaching the Kodesh K’dashim (the Holy of Holies). HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin extends this warning to the B’nei Yisrael as a whole. Even though only the Kohanim had permission to go into the Holy because it was only they who performed the service and might have responsibilities in the Holy, Sorotzkin extends this warning to the entire B’nei Yisrael as was done at Har Sinai. The B’nei Yisrael were told not to approach the mountain or they would die. Hashem was to rest on the mountain while giving the Torah to Moshe. Now that Hashem’s presence was to rest between the cherubim on top of the Aron Kodesh in the Kodesh K’dashim, the warning not to approach the division between the Kodesh and the Kodesh K’dashim was necessary. Only the Kohein Gadol would enter the Kodesh K’dashim and then only once a year on Yom Kippur to atone for the B’nei Yisrael’s sins. The Ohr HaChaim explains that there was a definite fear that Aharon and his sons might see that Moshe had a special relationship with Hashem and was permitted to enter the Kodesh K’dashim anytime to talk directly with Hashem. They might be under the impression that they too could enter at any time to talk to Hashem since they were close relatives of Moshe. The Kli Yakar continues this same idea. He asks, “Why should Aharon now be warned about entering?” Aharon might believe that he could enter the Kodesh K’dashim because of the merit of Moshe, his brother. Aharon is warned here that he has just lost two of his sons because they wished to interpret the law in their benefit and without consultation. Moshe needed to warn his brother that his relationship with Hashem was different and was governed by a different set of laws.

Sorotzkin explains that Aharon had just lost two of his sons yet he was not permitted to mourn for them since he was the Kohein Gadol. There was a special Holiness of the Kohein Gadol that affected whom he

could marry and whether he could become impure in order to bury his relatives. He was not permitted to take time from his responsibilities in the Mishkan in order to mourn his sons. Sorotzkin explains that Hashem sent Moshe to give *nichumin*, words of comfort to his brother. We are told “and Hashem spoke to Moshe,” but we are not told what He said. Sorotzkin points out that “there is no use of the word *dibur* except to mean words of comfort.” Why was it necessary for this command to be said to Moshe and not to all of the B’nei Yisrael? Our Rabbis tell us that it is always in the nature of man to accept comfort from his relatives before he will accept comfort from others.

The bond of brotherhood is extremely strong. Rivalry and jealousy can destroy relationships yet can be overcome at a time of crisis. Moshe is called on to comfort his brother and we are not given any information as to what he said. The fact is that what he said is unimportant; it is the fact that he was there which was what comforted Aharon. This is true in most cases of comfort. The words which are said are often not what stay with the mourner as a memory. It is the fact that a family member was there to help and to listen.

We are given these lessons by Hashem through one word, *achecha*. When we approach the Torah from that understanding we see the depth of our treasure. May we learn to discover more of what the Torah has to offer us through our continuous study of Hashem’s Torah, His never-ending conversation with us. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Kedoshim is one of several that tries to instill “Jewish Values”, one of which is the commandment not to steal. In an effort to drive home the point, the Torah uses several terms that seem redundant, when it says “Do not steal, do not deny falsely, and do not lie to one another” (19:11). Other than making sure we get the point, what is the significance of these specific forms of honesty being listed?

The Gemara in Makot (24a) sheds some light by saying that the Torah is telling us to speak the truth in our hearts, like Rav Safra did. The Gemara goes on to tell the story of Rav Safra who was davening (praying) when someone came to buy something from him. When Rav Safra didn’t respond because he was praying, the buyer raised his price several times, until finally Rav Safra finished praying and responded. Rav Safra insisted on selling the object at his original price, even though the man offered more because in his heart Rav Safra agreed to the first price.

The Torah is driving home that we should not steal in actions or words. That means not manipulating people to get what you desire, not distorting words to fit

your opinion, and not frivolously demanding from others. If we live by these Torah values, we'll hopefully fully value them. ©2003 Rabbi D. Kramer

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Touching Food

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

In our Parsha it states the words "V'initen et Nafshsechem" 17;31 (you shall afflict yourselves).

This language "to afflict" appears four more times with relation to the holiday of Yom Kippur, in which our Rabbis derive the five activities that one must refrain from doing on Yom Kippur (eating, drinking, anointing, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations).

In the Jerusalem Talmud, Law Five, it states that the showbread which was usually divided by the Kohanim (priests) on Shabbat, when Yom Kippur falls on a Shabbat they would divide it after the completion of Shabbat. It would seem that even touching this bread, and by extension even touching food would similarly be forbidden on Yom Kippur.

There are those who say, that touching food on Yom Kippur is really not an issue since the severity of the day is upon the individual and one would never therefore eat food because one touches it. The Imrat Chasidim seems to concur when he states that even if all the fast days were eliminated, people would still fast on Yom Kippur because of the seriousness of the day.

In order to explain the Jerusalem Talmud that was quoted earlier, one must say that it was sited not in the context of a law but rather according to the view that states that one may prepare from Yom Kippur (if it falls on a Shabbat) to after Shabbat, and in that setting even on Yom Kippur it would be forbidden because one might come to eat it by touching it.

However according to the accepted law, this is not necessary. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

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

intermingling with the nations of the world. The drastic skin color contrast of the Ethiopians serves as a striking analogy to the drastic ethical contrast between the Jewish people and all other nations.

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

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

This special lesson reflects the essence of this week's parsha, Kedoshim, which embodies Hashem's lofty call to us for spiritual elevation. The Torah begins and says, "Be holy for I, Hashem, am Holy." (Vayikra 19:2) Nachmanides (ad loc.) shares with us his classic insight into this mitzva. "Be holy", says the Ramban, "refers to the introduction of sanctity and spirituality into every dimension of our lives." Even our physical and mundane activities should be directed towards Hashem. We are forbidden to excessively indulge in worldly pleasures and are expected to limit our passions and pleasures to productive and accomplishing acts. Morality and spirituality should encompass our entire being and our every action should ultimately become the service of Hashem. This philosophy is diametrically opposed to that of the nations of the world. To them physical pleasure and

enjoyment have no restrictions or limitations and religion does not govern their passions or cravings. As said, our standards of morality are truly unique and it is this factor that elevates us and distinguishes us from amongst the nations of the world.

The parsha concludes with this message and says, "And you shall be holy unto Me for I am holy and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine." As stated, we are Hashem's people because of our holiness -- elevated moral and ethical standards -- which truly separate us from the nations of the world. And in this merit we will soon experience our final redemption and be a nation unto Him, privileged to remain in His presence for eternity. ©2015 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Color Me Needed

"You shall not place a cut for the dead in your flesh, and a tattoo you shall not place upon yourselves. I am Hashem." Cutting the flesh and tattooing are not forbidden by the Torah. Despite what our pesukim seem to say, the preceding sentence is perfectly defensible.

Were it the act of cutting the flesh as a sign of mourning for a loved one, the Torah would have expressed itself differently. If making a permanent mark or tattoo on the body were an objectionable act, if this were considered an affront to some assumed sanctity of the human body, the Torah would have used a different verb to describe the prohibition. In both cases mentioned in our pasuk, verb forms exist that could better pinpoint the activity that is objectionable and forbidden.

In both cases, though, the Torah expresses the prohibition as a forbidden nesinah, or "placing." You shall not place a cut... you shall not place a tattoo. The Torah does not prohibit the cutting and tattooing per se, so much as having that cut or tattoo remain in place as a statement to the rest of the world.

In the case of the flesh-cutting for the dead, we are looking here at something similar to the tearing of a garment as a sign of mourning, which not only is not objectionable, but is a commanded part of our mourning procedure. Our clothes are physically the closest things to our own bodies. When we lose a dear relative, we acknowledge that our personal world has sustained a breach. Its material has been torn. Its wholeness has been disturbed; where it all came together, there is now a jagged edge and a gap filled with emptiness.

Such a statement of loss is both poetic and appropriate. The Torah teaches, however, that it becomes excessive when we apply it to our bodies, to our very selves. Placing that cut on our persons conveys the idea that it is not just our personal worlds that have become darkened and insufficient, but our

very lives. Wearing that cut upon ourselves expresses the thought that the passing of someone dear to us leaves us forever lacking and incomplete.

This is almost sacrilegious. We should never doubt the value of our own existence. First of all, our existence is not ours to savor as we please. All that we have belongs to Him, and we are to employ it all in His service. We cannot excuse any part of it from that service, by declaring it non-functional, by insisting that its vital force has been so drawn out of it, that it is for all intents and purpose a ghost of its previous self.

Secondly, He is not arbitrary. Each person has his place, his function. Each has his unique value to Him. The death of one individual should not lead to despair and lethargy in a survivor. To the contrary, belief in a G-d Who is purposeful and deliberate demands that we understand the loss of any human being as a loss to the world-and therefore demands that we who live on must work harder to compensate for the loss, rather than retire to brooding and moroseness.

The gemara (Makos 21A) sees an organic relationship between lacerating oneself as a sign of mourning, and doing so as an idolatrous devotion, such as the priests of Baal did. ("They gashed themselves as was their practice with swords and spears." (Melachim I 18:28)) This opens us up to the possibility that one of the Torah's objectives in prohibiting the mourning-cut is to firmly oppose the pagan world's attitude towards death. Ancient idolaters saw Death as an independent power that delighted in draining life from the living. Human beings were essentially powerless in all their interactions with the gods. Human success or failure in dealing with them was contingent on winning their favor by appeasing them. You won their approval or at least their benign tolerance by paying homage to them. When a survivor contemplated the death of someone close to him, his best form of protection was to acknowledge the terrible power of Death by paying tribute to it. The self-mutilation was that tribute; through it, a person hoped to avoid the same fate.

The Torah, of course, knows of no independent power of death that seeks to quash life. The Torah knows of no independent power outside of G-d, period. Both life and death owe equally to Hashem and to nothing else. As hard as it may be for creatures of flesh and blood to emotionally comprehend, life and its opposite both flow from the goodness of the One G-d who celebrates life and love. It follows that sacrificing a life-or even a small fraction of one-in recognition of the death of another can never pay homage to Hashem. To the contrary, any statement of profound, irrevocable loss borders on blasphemy. The same G-d who decreed the death of one person decreed that the survivors remain alive. Life means that He has expectation invested in us. To deny that we remain capable of living fully is nothing less than a repudiation

of Him and His plans for us!

The tattooing prohibition also highlights the difference between idolatrous belief and the true faith. The gemara's discussion (Makos, *ibid.*) makes it clear that the starting point of the prohibition is etching into one's skin the name of another deity. Here, too, the Torah speaks in terms of placing the mark on oneself, rather than the act of tattooing. Placing such a name on one's flesh is a sign of subservience and devotion. This part of the prohibition is intuitive.

The majority opinion in the gemara, however, holds that the prohibition applies equally to all inscriptions. The Torah extends the basic prohibition to include much more than the names of foreign gods (See Ritva s.v. Rebbi Shimon). It follows that tattooing Hashem's Name on one's flesh is equally prohibited! What could be objectionable about a person displaying his devotion to his Creator by proudly dedicating his very body to His service?

Here is where the Torah point of view once again stands all other assumptions on their head. In other faiths, people make a decision to join the faith-group and devote their energies to its goals. Until you make that decision, you are an outsider. Torah Judaism does not see our service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu as a matter of preference or choice. Human beings are obligated in His service because they are created in His image. They need no other reminder of their obligation. Any external sign etched on to the body created in His image gives the false impression that entering into His service is a matter of choice, rather than inherent in the human condition.

(Rav Hirsch does not pause here to consider *bris milah*, which midrashim understand as indeed providing a reminder of a Jew's subservience to Hashem. Rav Hirsch's commentary to Bereishis, however, makes it clear that he believes that *bris milah* says much more than that, and therefore does not conflict with the thesis he develops here.)

Both of the prohibitions we have considered-cutting the flesh and tattooing-are similar. Each begins with a rejection of the mistaken notions of paganism, but ultimately go well beyond that. They lead to recognition of the proper relationship we maintain with HKBH, far away from the debased subservience to dark forces that remains part of contemporary life, centuries after the old gods disappeared from Western consciousness. (Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Vayikra 19:28) ©2011 Rav Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Aharon shall lean his two hands upon the head of the living he-goat and confess upon it all the iniquities of Bnei Yisrael,... and send it with a designated man to the desert. The he-goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land, and

he [the messenger] should send the he-goat to the desert." (16:21-22)

The Mishnah (Yoma 66a) teaches that, even though it was Yom Kippur, there were way-stations where food and drink were offered to the man taking the se'ir lazazel to the desert. However, says the Gemara (Yoma 67a), the person never needed the food or drink. This illustrates the principle that "one who has bread in his basket is not like one who does not have bread in his basket," i.e., a person who has the ability to fulfill a particular desire generally does not desire that thing as strongly as does one who does not have the ability to fulfill that desire.

Rabbeinu Nissim z"l ("Ran"; 14th century; Barcelona, Spain) writes that this is the same principle which states that a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated to perform that mitzvah merits greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated to perform that mitzvah. When one is obligated to do a certain mitzvah, the yetzer hara resists. One who is not obligated does not experience that resistance, just as someone "who has bread in his basket" is immune from the whiles of the yetzer hara.

Ran continues: There is another reason why a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated earns greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated. If G-d commands that a certain mitzvah be done by a certain category of people or in certain circumstances, and not others, it is because that is the only way the "secret" behind that mitzvah can be actualized. Even though a person who is not commanded may still be permitted to do that particular mitzvah, his actions do not accomplish the tikkun / spiritual rectification that that mitzvah was designed to accomplish. (Derashot Ha'Ran: drush chamishi, nusach bet)

Elsewhere, Ran offers a third reason for why a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated merits greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated. If G-d needed our mitzvot, then there would be no difference between one who is commanded and one who is not, for each would have given G-d exactly the same thing. In fact, however, G-d does not need our mitzvot; rather, they were given to us in order bring us merit. That merit, however, can come about only by following

G-d's instructions, not by doing things He did not command. (Derashot Ha'Ran: drush shevi'i) ©2014 S. Katz & torah.org

