

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

There is a fascinating sequence of commands in the great "holiness code" with which our parsha begins, that sheds light on the nature not just of leadership in Judaism but also of followership. Here is the command in context: Do not hate your brother in your heart. Reprove [or reason with] your neighbour frankly so you will not bear sin because of him. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord. (Lev. 19: 17-18)

There are two completely different ways of understanding the italicized words. Maimonides brings them both as legally binding.¹ Nahmanides includes them both in his commentary to the Torah.²

The first is to read the command in terms of interpersonal relations. Someone, you believe, has done you harm. In such a case, says the Torah, do not remain in a state of silent resentment. Do not give way to hate, do not bear a grudge, and do not take revenge. Instead, reprove him, reason with him, tell him what you believe he has done and how you feel it has harmed you. He may apologise and seek to make amends. Even if he does not, at least you have made your feelings known to him. That in itself is cathartic. It will help you to avoid nursing a grievance.

The second interpretation, though, sees the command in impersonal terms. It has nothing to do you being harmed. It refers to someone you see acting wrongly, committing a sin or a crime. You may not be the victim. You may be just an observer. The command tells us not to be content with passing a negative judgment on his behaviour (i.e. with "hating him in your heart"). You must get involved. You should remonstrate with him, pointing out in as gentle and constructive a way as you can, that what he is doing is against the law, civil or moral. If you stay silent and do nothing, you will become complicit in his guilt (i.e. "bear sin because of him") because you saw him do wrong and you did nothing to protest.

This second interpretation is possible only because of Judaism's fundamental principle that kol Yisrael arevin zeh ba-zeh, "All Jews are sureties [i.e.

responsible] for one another." However, the Talmud makes a fascinating observation about the scope of the command: One of the rabbis said to Raba: [The Torah says] hokheach tokhiach, meaning "you shall reprove your neighbour repeatedly" [because the verb is doubled, implying more than once]. Might this mean hokheach, reprove him once, and tokhiach, a second time? No, he replied, the word hokheach means, even a hundred times. Why then does it add the word tokhiach? Had there been only a single verb I would have known that the law applies to a master reprovng his disciple. How do we know that it applies even to a disciple reprovng his master? From the phrase, hokheach tokhiach, implying, under all circumstances.³

This is significant because it establishes a principle of critical followership. So far in these essays we have been looking at the role of the leader in Judaism. But what about that of the follower? On the face of it the duty of the follower is to follow, and that of the disciple to learn. After all, Judaism commands almost unlimited respect for teachers. "Let reverence for your teacher be as great as your reverence for heaven," said the sages. Despite this the Talmud understands the Torah to be commanding us to remonstrate even with our teacher or leader should we see him or her doing something wrong.

Supposing a leader commands you to do something you know to be forbidden in Jewish law. Should you obey? The answer is a categorical No. The Talmud puts this in the form of a rhetorical question: "Faced with a choice between obeying the master [God] or the disciple [a human leader], whom should you obey?"⁴ The answer is obvious. Obey God. Here in Jewish law is the logic of civil disobedience, the idea that we have a duty to disobey an immoral order.

Then there is the great Jewish idea of active questioning and "argument for the sake of heaven." Parents are obliged, and teachers encouraged, to train students to ask questions. Traditional Jewish learning is designed to make teacher and disciple alike aware of the fact that more than one view is possible on any question of Jewish law and multiple interpretations (the traditional number is seventy) of any biblical verse. Judaism is unique in that virtually all of its canonical texts – Midrash, Mishnah and Gemara – are anthologies of arguments

¹ Maimonides, Hilkhot Deot 6:6-7.

² Nahmanides, Commentary to Leviticus 19:17.

³ Baba Metzia 31a.

⁴ Kiddushin 42b.

(Rabbi X said this, Rabbi Y said that) or are surrounded by multiple commentaries each with its own perspective.

The very act of learning in rabbinic Judaism is conceived as active debate, a kind of gladiatorial contest of the mind: "Even a teacher and disciple, even a father and son, when they sit to study Torah together become enemies to one another. But they do not move from there until they have become beloved to one another."⁵ Hence the Talmudic saying, "Much wisdom I have learned from my teacher, more from my colleagues but most from my students."⁶ Therefore despite the reverence we owe our teachers, we owe them also our best efforts at questioning and challenging their ideas. This is essential to the rabbinical ideal of learning as a collaborative pursuit of truth.

The idea of critical followership gave rise in Judaism to the world's first social critics, the prophets, mandated by God to speak truth to power and to summon even kings to the bar of justice and right conduct. That is what Samuel did to Saul, Elijah to Ahab and Isaiah to Hezekiah. None did so more effectively than the prophet Nathan when, with immense skill, he got King David to appreciate the enormity of his sin in sleeping with another man's wife. David immediately recognised his wrong and said chatati, "I have sinned."⁷

Exceptional though the prophets of Israel were, even their achievement takes second place to one of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of religion, namely that God himself chooses as His most beloved disciples the very people who are willing to challenge heaven itself. Abraham says, "Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?" Moses says, "Why have you done evil to this people?" Jeremiah and Habakkuk challenge God on the apparent injustices of history. Job, who argues with God, is eventually vindicated by God, while his comforters, who defended God, are deemed by God to have been in the wrong. In short, God Himself chooses active, critical followers rather than those who silently obey.

Hence the unusual conclusion that in Judaism followership is as active and demanding as leadership. We can put this more strongly: leaders and followers do not sit on opposite sides of the table. They are on the same side, the side of justice and compassion and the common good. No one is above criticism, and no one too junior to administer it, if done with due grace and humility. A disciple may criticise his teacher; a child may challenge a parent; a prophet may challenge a king; and all of us, simply by bearing the name Israel, are summoned to wrestle with God and our fellow humans in the name of the right and the good.

Uncritical followership and habits of silent obedience give rise to the corruptions of power, or

sometimes simply to avoidable catastrophes. For example, a series of fatal accidents occurred between 1970 and 1999 to planes belonging to Korean Air. One in particular, Korean Air Flight 8509 in December 1999, led to a review that suggested that Korean culture, with its tendency toward autocratic leadership and deferential followership, may have been responsible for the first officer not warning the pilot that he was off-course.

John F. Kennedy assembled one of the most talented group of advisors ever to serve an American President, yet in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 committed one of the most foolish mistakes. Subsequently, one of the members of the group, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., attributed the error to the fact that the atmosphere within the group was so convivial that no one wanted to disturb it by pointing out the folly of the proposal.⁸

Groupthink and conformism are perennial dangers within any closely-knit group, as a series of famous experiments by Solomon Asch, Stanley Milgram, Philip Zimbardo and others have shown. Which is why, in Cass Sunstein's phrase, "societies need dissent." My favourite example is one given by James Surowiecki in *The Wisdom of Crowds*. He tells the story of how an American naturalist, William Beebe, came across a strange sight in the Guyana jungle. A group of army ants was moving in a huge circle. The ants went round and round in the same circle for two days until most of them dropped dead. The reason is that when a group of army ants is separated from their colony, they obey a simple rule: follow the ant in front of you.⁹ The trouble is that if the ant in front of you is lost, so will you be.

Surowiecki's argument is that we need dissenting voices, people who challenge the conventional wisdom, resist the fashionable consensus and disturb the intellectual peace. "Follow the person in front of you" is as dangerous to humans as it is to army ants. To stand apart and be willing to question where the leader is going is the task of the critical follower. Great leadership happens when there is strong and independently minded followership. Hence, when it comes to constructive criticism, a disciple may challenge a teacher and a prophet reprimand a king. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2014 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“**A**nd you shall not let any of your seed pass through (the fire) to Moloch, neither shall you profane the name of your God, I am the Lord.”

⁵ Kiddushin 30b

⁶ Ta'anit 7a.

⁷ 2 Samuel 12:13.

⁸ See Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, Harvard University Press, 2003, 2-3.

⁹ James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, Little, Brown, 2004, 40-41.

(Leviticus 18:21) The great Talmudic sage Rav Yehuda (in the name of Rav) applies the commandment “love your neighbor as [you love] yourself” to the relationship of husband and wife, the closest and most proximate of neighbors. Indeed, one of the seven blessings under the nuptial canopy even refers to the couple as “re'im ahuvim” or “beloved (loving) friends.”

But the marriage ceremony itself, one of the most exalted and simplistically stunning in our liturgy, raises a number of problematic issues. The initial blessing of betrothal declares: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, commanded us regarding forbidden sexual relationships, prohibited us from sexual relations with our fiancé and has permitted us those to whom we are married by means of the nuptial canopy and the betrothal sanctification. Blessed are You Who sanctifies His nation Israel by means of the nuptial canopy and betrothal sanctification.”

What makes this formulation so strikingly different from every other blessing over a commandment is that it mentions what is forbidden as a prelude to what it permitted. Why? Would it not have been sufficient for the blessing to have spoken only about the positive, without mentioning the negative?

Moreover, there are an additional seven blessings recited under the nuptial canopy which go far beyond the loving relationship of the couple about to be wed; one blessing brings us all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (“cause these loving [and beloved] friends to joyfully rejoice just as You caused Your creations to rejoice in the Garden of Eden”), and the final blessing brings us forward to the future period of redemption (“May there soon be heard in the Cities of Judea and in the broad spaces of Jerusalem the sound of rejoicing and the sound of happiness, the sound of grooms and the sound of brides.”)

What has a marriage ceremony to do with a national history spanning incalculable centuries from ancient past to anticipated future?

The answer is to be found in the seemingly problematic structure of the three main chapters in the Torah portion of Kedoshim and part of the previous portion of Acharei Mot. Chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus (the concluding chapter of Acharei Mot) deals with forbidden sexual relationships, beginning with incest and concluding with sacrificing one's child to the idol, Moloch, and the prohibition against homosexuality; chapter 19, which opens the portion of Kedoshim, starts with the commandment to revere one's parents and then catalogues scores of laws dealing with interpersonal relationships, including loving one's neighbor as one loves oneself. And then, in chapter 20, the Bible returns to the catalogue of forbidden sexual relationships, beginning with the prohibition of sacrificing one's child to the idol, Moloch. Why not have all the forbidden sexual relationships in one place? Why the seeming interruption

with chapter 19?

What is equally strange and disturbing is that the initial introduction to the laws of forbidden sexual relationships (at the beginning of chapter 18) is the verse: “You shall observe My decrees and My statutes which a human being shall do and live by them...” (Lev. 18:5). Our Talmudic sages deduce from the command “You shall...live by them” that when push comes to shove, the Jew must generally transgress a commandment rather than forfeit his life; the value of a human life stands above the commands of the Torah (Yoma 85a, b). However, the sole exceptions to this rule are the three most stringent prohibitions of idolatry, sexual immorality and murder. Hence, if a Jew is ordered to commit an act of incest or adultery or else he will be murdered, he may not invoke the usual “You shall...live by them” and commit the forbidden act, but rather he must choose to die rather than to transgress. If this is the case, then how can we understand the command “You shall... live by them” placed as the introduction to the laws of sexual immorality? These are specifically the prohibitions for which a person must be willing to lay down his life.

Rashi explains that this injunction “You shall live by them” refers to the world to come, because if you will suggest that it refers to this world, eventually (everyone in this world) dies (Rashi, Lev. 18:5). If I might alter Rashi's words a little without removing his fundamental idea, I would suggest that it refers to life in its historical dimension, to the ability of the individual Jew to participate as a link in the great and eternal chain of Jewish historic being. The family is the bedrock of the nation, and it is specifically the laws of sexual morality which guarantee Jewish preservation and continuity physically as well as spiritually. An individual destroys his seeds of continuity if he sacrifices his child to Moloch, or if he defies the familial faithfulness by adultery. In the most profound sense, Judaism will only continue to live eternally if the laws of sexual immorality are seen as so sacrosanct that they even stand above the value of preserving a human life. Therefore, the laws of interpersonal human relationships, the necessary bedrock of a well-ordered and continuing society, must be preceded and followed by the stringent rules against sexual immorality; only then will we truly live as an eternal historic nation.

Thus the Bible, in its very chapter sequence, expresses one of the essential and amazing paradoxes of Jewish life. If the Jewish nation wishes to live as a distinct historical entity whose mission is to perfect society and redeem the world, they must first and foremost conform to the laws of family sanctity and the prohibition of sexual immorality – and this is Leviticus, chapter 18. Then come the fundamental principles of interhuman relationships, beginning with proper reverence for parents and including the love one must feel for one's spouse, not forgetting the prohibitions

against jealousy and the commandments concerning tithes and charity for those who do not have their own property or means of livelihood – and this is chapter 19. The Bible then finds it necessary to return to the laws of sexual morality, the very actions which cause us to lose the succeeding generations, if not physically then certainly spiritually (as certain as giving our children over to Moloch), but this time including the capital punishments, the very antithesis of the introductory “You shall live by them,” for those who actually transgress – and this is chapter 20.

The structure and lesson of the biblical form is exquisitely maintained in the precise formulation of the marital blessings, the couple (and eventual family) representing the fundamental key to Jewish survival and eternity. The Almighty has forbidden certain sexual relationships; only if and when we maintain these prohibitions shall we have earned the unique honor of having been sanctified by means of the nuptial canopy and betrothal sanctification. And the reward for living such a sanctified life is that it enables us to live eternally as a link in the golden chain of the Jewish historical continuum – with memories which go back to the Garden of Eden and visions of anticipation which go forward to the ultimate redemption. The marriage canopy bears both the responsibility and the glory of Jewish eternity, past and future. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. ©2024 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah's definition of holiness and sanctity, of dignity of self and others, of respect to one's body and that of others, is in the ability to channel and control one's physical desires. The Torah explicitly does not condone celibacy nor does it demand from human beings any degree of self-mortification or masochism. It does most certainly demand from us responsible and balanced human behavior.

It outlines a necessary and omnipresent nuance in our lives - in our mental and physical behavior. The rabbis have taught us that humans willingly sin only because a manner of distorted thinking - a type of insanity if you will - enters one's mind and being.

Judaism has always fought the lonely and mainly unpopular battle against sexual immorality and flagrantly wanton behavior. From the Canaanites through the Greeks and the Romans, the debauchery of much of the Medieval Age and the current unchecked and unrestrained attitudes of modern society, traditional Judaism has decried lewdness and wanton self-gratification in sexual matters.

It has demanded that people be kdoshim - separated from immoral behavior and forbidden liaisons.

It demands self-control, the avoidance of compromising and dangerous situations and a realization that ultimate good sense should triumph over momentary gratification.

Judaism imposes on us an unpopular stance, especially so in our current modern society. And yet over the long history of human society, it has proven to be the only correct guide for a healthy, happy family life and a more harmonious social compact between people.

Many people, Jews included, mock the protective measures enjoined by Jewish tradition to insure a society that aspires to be one of kdoshim. The mingling of the sexes in synagogue worship in the non-Orthodox world has not brought any great degree of comfort to those people who sit together. It has rather led to a drastic decline in synagogue attendance and participation in those groups.

The whole concept of modesty in dress, speech and behavior is unfortunately completely absent and alien in most of modern society. Not a day passes when we are not made aware of the presence of sexual misconduct among those that seemingly should know better.

Judaism preaches defensive behavior and the avoidance of situations that could lead to problematic circumstances. Such defensive measures are mocked and scorned by the progressives of the current world. Yet we are witness to the tragic personal and national consequences that results in life when such defensive measures are absent or ignored.

Mental health experts have told me that pornography, especially on the internet, is the newest serious addiction in our schools, making drugs old hat and no longer cool. Protected by the noble ideal of free speech, it ravages our society and creates a dangerously dysfunctional generation and society.

The entertainment industry in all of its facets has been polluted beyond recognition by its pandering to the basest animalistic desires of humans. Nevertheless, the Torah does not waver in its demand to us to be kdoshim, to swim against the tide and persevere in our age-long quest to be a holy and dedicated people. ©2024 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

The Torah stresses the importance of venerating the elderly, mandating that we “Rise up before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear God: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:32).

The honor given to the elderly plays an important role in our lives: it reminds us that they can and do make significant contributions to society. It is also important to remind the elderly themselves of this truth. Otherwise,

too often older people can be caught in a vicious cycle: If treated as infirm, they can consequently feel incapacitated and cease believing they can still help themselves – let alone that they have something to offer others.

Now that I've reached a senior age, I too experience this phenomenon. I now pay half fare on subways and buses. While this discount is perhaps intended to honor us, the effect can also be detrimental. If we pay half fare, we may begin to believe we only half contribute to society.

Rabbi Benjamin Blech quotes a 1961 talk on aging given by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel at the White House. In it, Rabbi Heschel sees older years as potentially the most formative. His words to that effect, uttered more than fifty years ago, resonate powerfully even today: May I suggest that man's potential for change and growth is much greater than we are willing to admit and that old age be regarded not as the age of stagnation, but as the age of opportunities for inner growth. The years of old age may enable us to attain the high values we have failed to sense, the insights we have missed, the wisdom we have ignored. They are indeed formative years...

Now, of course, there are elderly people – and for that matter people of all ages – who are limited and have little to contribute. Even then, the rabbis insist, by virtue of their life experiences and having lived long years, they deserve to be honored (Kiddushin 33a).

The elderly are considered the most god-like of people. Note that the mandate to honor the elderly concludes with the words "I am the Lord." In his later years, my father explained the juxtaposition by suggesting that God is telling us here that, since He is the oldest in the universe, He is particularly concerned about those who share this divine quality and about the way they are treated. Honoring the elderly is honoring God. Dishonoring the elderly is dishonoring God. ©2024 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

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Withholding Wages

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

We are commanded to pay the wages of a worker at the proper time. Should a person not pay at the appropriate time, he is disregarding the positive commandment to pay on time ("*be-yomo titen secharo*") as well as transgressing the negative commandment not to withhold wages (*bal talin*). However, such a transgressor does not receive lashes (*malkot*). For he is obligated to pay the money he owes, and when there is a negative commandment which requires payment there are no *malkot*. Additionally, transgressing this negative commandment involves not taking a required action (*lav*

she'ein bo ma'aseh), rather than taking a forbidden one. *Malkot* are not given for a passive transgression.

All this applies to cases in which the person who must pay makes clear that while he does not have the funds currently, he understands that he has an obligation to pay and plans to do so eventually. In contrast, if a person refuses to pay, or claims that he never hired the worker, he is transgressing five negative commandments and one positive one. This applies even when a worker is hired for hourly or daily work, and certainly applies to a worker who was hired on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, or seven-year (*shemita*) basis.

When a person commissions a craftsman to make something for him, the customer does not have an obligation to pay immediately upon the job's completion. This is because the craftsman has in his possession the finished object, for which the customer supplied the material. If the craftsman supplied his own raw material, there is certainly no prohibition of *bal talin* if the customer does not pick it up immediately, since in this case the craftsman is considered a salesman rather than a hired worker.

The prohibition of *bal talin* applies whether one hired a person, an animal, or an object.

However, if when the contract is drawn up the employer stipulates that he does not have to pay immediately, then he does not transgress *bal talin*. Indeed, it is preferable that the conditions of the contract be clearly stated at the outset. This way, the employer can avoid a situation in which he has a cash flow problem and is unable to pay what he owes, thus transgressing *bal talin*. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

“Love your fellow like yourself" (Vayikra 19:18) cannot be meant literally. Ultimate concern for oneself is ingrained in our essences. There is a striking Midrash on the pasuk "For my father and mother have abandoned me, and Hashem has gathered me in" (Tehillim 27:10). Dovid Hamelech, says the Midrash, was stating that his parents' focus at his conception was on their personal relationship; it was about themselves, not him. In that sense, explains the Midrash, they "abandoned" him.

But consider: Dovid's father was Yishai -- one of the four people who Chazal tell us (Shabbos 55b) "died by the counsel of the nachash," the serpent in Gan Eden. In other words, he was personally without sin. And yet he is being described as, in some way, selfish?

It seems clear that ultimate self-concern is part and parcel of being human. So no one can actually love another quite the same way he loves himself.

Nor can loving one's fellow like himself mean that one must give each person he meets half of his possessions. That would render him penniless in short shrift.

R' Meshullam Gross, in his sefer Nachalas Tzvi, notes that the wording of the imperative to love others like oneself uses the word *lirei'acha* (literally, "to one's fellow") rather than the simpler *es rei'acha*, echoing the wording of the commandment to "not covet... all that is to your fellow" in the Aseres Hadibros (Shemos 20:14).

Thus, he suggests, the imperative here is to consider the possessions -- and honor, and concerns... -- of one's fellow as dear to you as if they were yours. In other words, love the fact that your fellow has what he has and deserves what he deserves -- as much as you love what you have and feel you deserve. ©2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d." (Vayikra 19:2) The Ramban on this verse is quite famous. Whereas Rashi says that by distancing ourselves from things of a lascivious nature we become holier, the Ramban suggests that Hashem wants us to sanctify ourselves by desisting even from things that are permitted.

While one may be allowed to drink wine, for example, he should not allow himself to become indulgent to the point that he is fulfilling his desire for the animalistic pleasure it can impart. The same would be with food. Though it may be delicious, we should not let the desire and pleasure overtake our refined nature. By remaining cognizant of Man's lofty status, we can partake of things which are permitted in a proper way, and not wallowing in physicality.

There is more to the Ramban, however. He quotes the Midrash which says, in explaining the posuk of Kedoshim Tihiyu: "Just as I, Hashem, am holy, so shall you (the Jewish People) be holy. Just as I am abstinent, so shall you be abstinent." Hashem calls Himself a "porush," one who is separated and restrains himself from certain things, and adjures us to emulate this behavior.

How can Hashem ask us to be a "porush" like He is, when there are such monumental differences between us? How are we to understand that Hashem is abstinent when He has no physical desires? How are we, who do have these desires, supposed to hold back from them and thereby be like Hashem?

HaKadosh Baruch Hu lacks nothing. He can have whatever He wants, and indeed, created the world and everything in it. Where, then, do we find that He is a "porush"? The Gemara in Berachos (33b) says that Hashem only asks us to fear Heaven, and that all Hashem has in His treasury is a repository of *yiras shomayim*.

While Hashem could "desire" whatever He wished, and could fulfill that desire, He chooses to limit what He wishes to something that will build a connection between Him and Man. This is the type of asceticism we

are urged to pursue.

It's not that we are supposed to deny ourselves the things we want. Rather, we should train ourselves not to want anything other than a relationship with Hashem. There are many things we could and may enjoy, but there's a big difference between enjoying things and lusting after them. This is the difference we can make by becoming *kedoshim* like Hashem.

Chovos HaLevavos relates the story of a fellow who traveled to a distant land filled with savages who worshiped all sorts of deities. He laughingly derided them and said they were wasting their time. One of the savages approached him and said, "Whom then do YOU worship?" The man replied, "I worship the One who Created Heaven and Earth and can do all. I worship He who sustains all life and provides for all beings."

"Your deeds contradict your words," said the idol-worshiper. "If your G-d is truly all-powerful and provides for all creatures, could He not have provided for you back at home? Why then did you have to exert yourself to travel so far away in search of your livelihood?"

The fellow was shaken; jarred by the truth of the pagan's words. He immediately returned home and became a 'porush,' (separate, usually related to asceticism) never again chasing after his livelihood.

It is noteworthy that it does not say the man became a 'porush' and thereafter lived in a cave without thought to material well-being. Instead, the man continued to live a normal life, enjoying and participating in business. The only difference was that he was no longer chasing after the money, for he knew Hashem would provide for him wherever he was. ©2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Foundation of all Actions

Parashat Kedoshim contains one of the most iconic sentences in the Torah. The words, "V'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho, you shall love your fellow as yourself," have been repeated through many different religions as a guideline for our moral system. The entire parasha is a call to mankind to go beyond what is required by law so that we can become a holy nation. Even though this phrase is a key to our behavior, it does not stand alone. The sentences before this phrase must be examined so that we can learn through its context how to understand these words more clearly.

The Torah states, "You shall not do wrong in justice; you shall not favor a destitute man and you shall not honor a great man; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow. You shall not go about gossiping among your people, you shall not stand over the blood of your friend – I am Hashem. You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reprove your fellow and you shall not bear a sin because of him. You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the

members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.”

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that justice requires a blind eye. In every case before the court, the judges preferably will not know the litigants, but even if they are known, the judges must treat them as if they are strangers. While the Torah speaks of a destitute man and a great or rich man, the Rabbis interpret this to mean a person who is poor in performing mitzvot and a person who is rich in mitzvot. In any particular case, even the most righteous individual may be wrong and the most unscrupulous individual may be correct. The reputation of neither litigant may influence the facts of this singular case. A judge is not permitted to assume the guilt or innocence of either litigant based on their previous history.

From there the Torah warns against gossip, “You shall not go about gossiping among your people, you shall not stand over the blood of your friend – I am Hashem.” The Ramban explains that there are people who go from house to house with the intention of hearing something or seeing something that they can repeat in the marketplace. The Ohr HaChaim explains that the Torah cautioned against even positive gossip, as it may lead a person to repeat negative gossip as well. One cannot help but notice that there are two concepts contained within one sentence. This is also found in the next set of sentences. Here we have both the warning against speaking gossip attached to a command not to stand over the blood of one’s fellowman. Our Rabbis indicate that there is a connection between the two concepts. Not standing over blood means that one must save one’s fellowman if it is possible. This applies both physically, financially, and spiritually; one must try to save a drowning person if it does not endanger one’s own life. Gossip can emotionally “kill” a person as it destroys his reputation. The Torah requires that we avoid gossip not only because it can ruin a person’s reputation, but because one must not stand by when a person’s life is endangered.

The next pairing of concepts in one sentence is, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reprove your fellow and you shall not bear a sin because of him.” The Ramban explains that the only reason that one might hate a fellow Jew is that the Jew is breaking a law of the Torah, yet most people hide their anger in their heart, rather than demonstrating it to their friend. The Torah explain this silence is likely to cause one’s friend to continue to sin, which cyclically will cause ever-increasing anger. It is better to rebuke one’s friend kindly and with the right approach of love so that the behavior which causes both the sin and the hatred to end. In reality, it is not the fellow Jew who is hated, but only his behavior.

The last pairing in this section is, “You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as

yourself – I am Hashem.” HaRav Hirsch explains that the force behind the idea of not seeking revenge or bearing a grudge has mostly to do with not hiding one’s hurt when it takes place. One should be open with someone who has hurt you financially or emotionally, and try to work things out with that person so that the incident is settled. More importantly, if the other person refuses to acknowledge the problem, “the very remembrance of the wrong suffered is to be purged from one’s mind and feelings, although the other (person) has done nothing at all to make amends.”

This idea of not seeking revenge or bearing a grudge is tied to the singular phrase of the Torah which is the “summarizing final maxim for the whole of our social behavior, in feelings, word and deed,” “you shall love your fellow as yourself.” The Ohr HaChaim explains that one is limited by this phrase to love “rei’echa, your fellowman,” meaning one whose actions indicate belief in Hashem and His Torah. This does not exclude a non-practicing Jew, but instead one who demonstrates that he hates Hashem and the Torah.

The Kli Yakar quotes the famous Midrash from the Gemara (Shabbat 31a) that speaks of a non-Jew who came to Rabbi Akiva and asked him to explain the Torah while he stood on one foot. Akiva answered by quoting our pasuk, “you shall love thy neighbor as thyself,” and added that this was the foundation of all the laws of the Torah, and that the non-Jew should now study the entire Torah. The Kli Yakar explains that many of the Rabbis whom this non-Jew approached, believed that the non-Jew was mocking the Torah. Rabbi Akiva viewed his question to be honest and seeking clarification. Though the question appeared to be flippant, Rabbi Akiva understood that this non-Jew was looking for a basic principle which governed all the Torah Laws. Since it would be impossible for this non-Jew to understand the laws between Man and Hashem, such as laws of Kosher animals or keeping the Shabbat, Rabbi Akiva answered him about the essential concept which governed laws between Man and his Fellowman.

As we examine each of the laws preceding this final phrase, it becomes clear that each are governed by the principle of loving one’s fellowman as one loves oneself. An honest person would understand that every action towards others must be weighed against one’s desire to be treated in the same way, even when that may mean that it is to one’s disadvantage. One does not wish to be rebuked, but one does wish to correct any bad behaviors that drives him away from Hashem and His Torah. May we learn to control our behavior by this principle. © 2024 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Jewish Geography

The Torah describes the Land of Israel as “a land [where] milk and honey flows” numerous times, although Parashas Kedoshim is the only time in

Sefer Vayikra (20:24). What does this expression mean? What kind of milk, and what kind of honey?

On Chumash (Shemos 13:5), Rashi says “milk flows from the goats and honey flows from the dates and from the figs.” Putting aside why Rashi waited until the third time the Torah uses the expression to explain it, his explanation differs from how he explains it on the Talmud (Megillah 6a), where he says “the goats eat figs and the honey drips from them and the milk flows from the goats and they (the goats’ milk and the figs’ honey) form something that resembles a stream.” Although the milk is the same in both explanations, on the Talmud the honey is “fig honey,” while on Chumash it’s both “fig honey” and “date honey.” It should be noted, though, that his explanation on the Talmud is based on how the Talmud itself (Kesubos 111b) describes a first-hand account of seeing the land “flow” with milk and honey, where the honey came from figs.

As far as why Rashi includes date honey in his commentary on the Torah, the honey of the seven species (Devarim 8:8) refers to date honey (see Rashi on Devarim 26:2, but it’s implied in the verse itself, since – as Ibn Ezra on Vayikra 2:11 points out – figs were already mentioned as one of the land’s seven special species). Therefore, the starting point is that the land flows with date honey, with the first-hand account of goats eating figs and honey dripping from them adding a second type of honey. Elsewhere (Vayikra 2:11), Rashi says that “honey” refers to fruit-based sweetener, implying the sweetness of any fruit (not just dates and figs), something he says explicitly on Shevuos 12b.

Just as “honey” can refer to the extraction of any sweet fruit, “milk” is not limited to goat milk. As Ramban puts it (Shemos 3:8), “it’s a land [fit] for cattle because it has good pasture [for grazing] and its waters are nice, so the animals produce a lot of milk – as good, healthy animals that produce an abundance of milk require a good climate, lots of vegetation and good waters. And because that occurs in marshes and or on top of mountains – where fruits aren’t so plump or nice – [the Torah] says that the fruit is so plump and sweet that honey oozes from them.” Nevertheless, since the eyewitness accounts were of goat milk and fig honey, and the “honey” of the seven species is date honey – not to mention that these are the ones normally abundant in the Land of Israel – this is the “milk” and “honey” that most associate the land with.

In Mechilta d’Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai (on Shemos 13:5, quoted by Midrash HaGadol), R’ Eliezer doesn’t understand “milk” to mean animal milk, but the liquid that oozes from fruit. (He also says “honey” refers to date honey; I assume date honey is a separate category because it’s thicker than what oozes from other fruits.) Rabbi Akiva argues, insisting that “milk” means animal milk. He brings two proof-texts, one (Yoel 4:18) to prove that “milk” refers to animal milk, and the other (Shmuel I 14:26) to prove that “honey” is not limited to

date honey. Interestingly, that honey (which was in a forest) is not fruit honey. According to Rashi, the “forest” refers to sugar canes, with the “honey” being sap that flowed from them. Radak disagrees, saying the “forest” refers to trees (as it usually does), with honey flowing from the beehives in those trees. If we connect the dots (Rabbi Akiva using the verse to “prove” which honey flows in the Land of Israel, and Radak saying it was bee honey), one could argue that the expression (also) refers to bee honey. But the simpler, more straightforward way to understand it is the honey that oozes from its fruits, which usually manifests itself in date honey and fig honey. Similarly, “milk” is commonly understood to be animal milk (not the liquid that oozes from overly plump fruit), as one of the reasons given (Bechoros 6b) for the permissibility to drink the milk of kosher animals is that the Torah praises the Land of Israel for its milk.

Midrash Lekach Tov (Bamidbar 13:27) describes the report of the scouts – when they verified that the land flows with milk and honey – being “the honey flows from the trees, and the goats graze underneath and the milk of the goats flows underneath them, and the honey and the milk mix together.” Although this sounds similar to Rashi’s commentary on Megillah 6a, there the type of fruit was mentioned, and the goats were eating the fruit, causing the fruit’s honey to ooze out and mix with their milk. This Midrash has the goats grazing there (implying that they were eating the vegetation growing on the ground), without mentioning any fruit, with the implication being that the “honey” was the sap that flowed directly from the trees, rather than liquid that oozed from fruit. Either way, it indicates how bountiful the land is. ©2024 Rabbi D. Kramer

