

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

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 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* is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“For on this day He will forgive you, to purify you from all your sins; before the Lord you shall be purified.” (Leviticus 16:30) The major source for the awesome, white fast known as Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, is to be found in the Torah portion of Acharei Mot.

It is fascinating to note that while Yom Kippur is the most ascetic day of the Hebrew calendar—a twenty-five-hour period wherein eating, drinking, bathing, sexual relations, bodily anointment and leather shoes are all forbidden—it is nevertheless considered a joyous festival, even more joyous than the Sabbath (Yom Kippur nullifies the seven-day mourning period after the death of a close relative, whereas the Sabbath does not).

The great Hassidic sage Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev would often say, “Even had the Jewish tradition not commanded me to fast during our two major fast days, I would be too mournfully sad to eat on Tisha B’Av and I would be too excitedly joyous to eat on Yom Kippur.”

From whence the excitement, and from whence the joy? It seems to me that Yom Kippur is our annual opportunity for a second chance, our possibility of becoming forgiven and purified before God. On the festival of Matzot we celebrate our birth as a nation; seven months later on the festival of Yom Kippur we celebrate our rebirth as human beings. On Pesach we renew our homes and our dishes, routing out the leavening which symbolizes the excess materialism and physical appurtenances with which we generally surround ourselves; on the Day of Forgiveness we renew our deeds and our innermost personalities by means of repentance.

Despite the hard work entailed in pre-Pesach cleaning, and in due deference to the hardy Jewish

men and women who spend so much quality time tracking down all traces of leavening and thoroughly destroying them, such a physical cleaning job is still much easier than spiritual purification. Such a repentance is at least a two-step process, the first of which is kappara (usually translated as “forgiveness” and literally meaning “a covering over”) and the second tahara (usually translated as “purification” and literally meaning “a cleansing.”)

These two divine gifts of the day correspond to the two stages or results of transgression. The first is a stain or an imperfection in the world as a result of an act of theft or the expression of hateful words. The second is a stain on the individual soul as a result of his/her committing a transgression.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik believed that kappara – paying back the theft, asking for forgiveness by saying I am sorry, or bringing a sacrifice to the holy Temple – removes the first stage. Tahara – the repentance of the soul, the decision of the individual to change his personality and to be different from what and who he was before – removes the second. Kappara is an act of restitution, utilizing objects or words; tahara is an act of reconstitution of self, which requires a complete psychological and spiritual recast.

Clearly kappara, restitution – paying the debt, bringing the offering, beating one’s breast in confession – is much easier to achieve than a reconstitution of personality. How does Yom Kippur help one pass the second phase? How can an individual on a particular date acquire the requisite spiritual energy and profound spiritual inspiration to transform his/her inner being to be able to say: “I am now a different person; I am not the same one who committed those improper actions?”

I believe the answer is to be found in the manner in which we celebrate Yom Kippur. It is a day when we separate ourselves from our materialistic physical drives in order to free our spiritual selves to commune with God; the purpose of this separation is not to make us suffer but rather to enable us to enjoy the eternal life of the spirit in the presence of God.

We leave behind our homes and good clothes; our cars, wallets and credit cards; our business offices and cell phones; our physical drives for food and sex; and remain in the synagogue for a complete day, garbed in simple white dress and virtually naked before the loving Creator of the universe, who is ready to accept, forgive and purify us.

Indeed, Franz Rosenzweig, a Jewish theologian of the early twentieth century, entered university as a completely assimilated Jew. He decided to convert to Christianity, which he understood to be the advanced stage of Judaism. However, he decided that the most intellectually sound path for him to take was to graduate from Judaism into Christianity. He therefore began to study the biblical and Talmudic texts, and went to synagogue on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

He told his friend Rosenstock-Huessy that the prayer experience on Yom Kippur was so intense that he knew by the conclusion of the day that he would remain a Jew all of his life and would devote whatever time God gave him to live to study the faith of his forebears.

If we truly internalize what the day of Yom Kippur is trying to say to us, it can become a truly transforming experience. It is this kind of inspiration that Yom Kippur hopes to effectuate as we stand in God’s presence for a full day: “Before the Lord shall you be purified” (Lev. 16:30). And this is the message of Rabbi Akiva at the end of the Tractate Yoma: “Fortunate are you Israel! Before Whom are you purified and who purifies you – our Father in Heaven.... The Lord is the Mikveh of Israel: just as a mikveh purifies those who are impure, so does the Holy One Blessed be He purify Israel.” (Mishna Yoma 8:9) © 2025 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Usually, 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 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. 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 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. ©2025 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

“Hashem said to Moshe, “Speak to Aharon, your brother, and he shall not enter at all times, the holy... and he shall not die...” (Vayikra 16:2)

After the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, who were killed when they attempted “extra” closeness to Hashem, Aharon was to be warned that entry to the Holy of Holies, where the Aron and Keruvim were, could only be once per year, on Yom Kippur. Even then, it had to be under very specific circumstances. Noble though the intent of Nadav and Avihu was, it was improper, and Aharon and his sons were to be warned that only a Kohain Gadol could enter the inner sanctum, lest they share the same fate.

It is interesting to note that while the posuk in Shmini seems to indicate that Hashem, Himself, spoke to Aharon regarding drinking wine (some say it was also through Moshe,) here, Hashem tells Moshe to relay the message to Aharon, and it stresses that Aharon is his brother. Why didn't Hashem speak directly to Aharon in this case, also?

Perhaps we can suggest that Hashem was teaching Moshe, and all of us, how to be sensitive to others. Aharon had lost two precious, holy, children because they wished to enter the Kodosh Kadoshim, and now he was being warned about proper entry for himself as well. If Hashem, who carried out the punishment of Nadav and Avihu, were to give the warning to Aharon, he might feel self-conscious, as if Hashem were subtly blaming him for their actions; implying he had done something wrong or would make the same mistake and needed correction. By letting it

come from Moshe, it would be less abrasive, with less chance of Aharon wondering if Hashem was intimating any blame.

When, in Parshas Shmini, Hashem told Aharon that Kohanim could not drink wine before doing the Avoda, there was less of a chance he would feel bad. Generally, intoxicated people speak more than usual, and Aharon had the merit of remaining silent after his sons died. By showing his quiet faith in Hashem, an opposite action from drinking wine, he earned a direct command from Hashem, so there was no reason for him to feel bad.

Hashem even commanded Moshe to approach Aharon as a brother, to ensure he would speak gently - though firmly - so Aharon and subsequent Kohanim Gedolim would not make the same mistake his children did, and pay with their lives.

Even in a matter of life and death, where Hashem could have simply laid down the law because He is the Creator and Master of the Universe, Hashem still wanted to ensure Aharon didn't feel bad. Not only did it work, but Aharon, himself, understood this message, as we read in Pirkei Avos: “Hillel said, “Be of the students of Aharon... love people and bring them close to Torah.””

In order to positively influence people and bring them closer to Hashem, you must love them first. Then you will ensure that your messages and lessons come from a good place and are delivered in a positive way. Then you will succeed in bringing them to Hashem and His Torah.

A man who took great pride in his lawn found himself with a large crop of dandelions. He tried every method he knew to get rid of them. Still, they plagued him. Finally, he wrote to the Department of Agriculture.

He enumerated all the things he had tried and closed his letter with the question: “What shall I do now?”

In due course, the reply came: “We suggest you learn to love them.” ©2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

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Touching Food

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

In our Parsha it states the words “V'initten 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 cited 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 DAVID LEVIN

Emulate Hashem

In the combined parshiot of Acharei Mot and Kedoshim, we have concentrated previously on the death of Aharon's sons and Moshe's comforting actions towards his brother. This year we will discuss some of the familiar laws found in Kedoshim, with the admonishment to all to be Kadosh (holy, special) before Hashem. While it is difficult to define exactly what is being asked of the people, as Kadosh itself is hard to fully understand, perhaps we can get a glimpse of what is expected as we examine these laws.

Once one reads beyond the first sentence requiring every Jew to be holy because Hashem is holy, we find the commandment, "A man, his mother and his father you shall fear and My Sabbaths you shall guard, I am Hashem your Elokim." HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that just as a man must show honor and respect to his father, we are all obligated to show honor and respect to Hashem, since He is the Father of all. We also see clearly that if one's father insists that one must include breaking a Law that was given by Hashem in order to honor him, one is required to disobey his father who also owes honor and respect to Hashem and His Laws. The Rambam explains this concept using the metaphor of a king: a person must show respect for his parents as he would to a king, but the king must also defer to the Will of Hashem. The key word "and" indicates that the only way in which a person can do both the first and second parts of sentence is if the parents' wishes do not conflict with Hashem's Laws.

A second set of laws comes from the various offerings and sacrifices that are brought in the Temple. "When you slaughter a feast peace-offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it to find favor for yourselves. On the day of your slaughter shall it be eaten and on the

next day, and whatever remains until the third day shall be burned in fire. But if it shall be eaten on the third day, it is rejected – it shall not be accepted. Each of those who eat will bear his iniquity, for what is sacred to Hashem has he desecrated; and that soul will be cut off from his people." Here we find the law of Piggul, slaughtering an animal with the intention of not following the ways in which Hashem has approved of its slaughter. Here the intention of the slaughterer includes breaking the time frame within which the offering may be eaten. There are other procedures which may render an animal offering unacceptable, yet this inappropriate intention is more serious since it carries the punishment of kareit, cutting the person away from the Jewish People. Interestingly, piggul cannot take place unless every other aspect of the offering is done correctly. It is only considered piggul when the Kohein has the intention to act differently in this one aspect of the offering which strays from Hashem's instructions. Only then is the Kohein considered to have desecrated "what is sacred (holy) to Hashem."

A third set of laws involves the harvest and our obligations to the poor. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not complete your reaping to the corner of your field, and the gleanings of your harvest you shall not take. You shall not pick the undeveloped twigs of your vineyard; and the fallen fruit of your vineyard you shall not gather; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them, I am Hashem, your Elokim." There are two different approaches to charity in Jewish Law. Here we see a combination of the two. The obligation to leave a corner of the field (pei'ah) does not specify the size of that corner. The Talmud sets a minimum size but only limits the maximum size to be less than the entire field, as that would not be consistent with the definition of a corner. Here the Torah obligates the farmer but does not obligate a particular amount. The amount of charity depends on the generosity of the farmer. The second approach to charity is found in the laws of gleanings and fallen fruit (leket and shi'chi'chah). Here the farmer is required to leave that which is not cut during the harvest and that which falls during the harvest for the poor and the proselyte. Here there is no limit to one's obligation other than by the definition of what constitutes an amount that falls or is forgotten within the harvest. Hashem stresses that this obligation includes the concept, "I am Hashem, your Elokim."

The final example of Laws in parashat Kedoshim which we shall discuss involves the way that one treats people who have limitations. "You shall not curse the deaf, and you shall not place a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your Elokim, I am Hashem." The Ramban explains that the deaf person here will not know of the curse nor will he be embarrassed by it since he cannot hear it. The

Ramban explains that one must be even more careful when a person can hear and feel hurt because of what is said. Rashi extends the warning about a stumbling block to anyone who is "blind" about a law. One must be careful not to mislead a person by giving advice which may influence his decision or cause him to inadvertently transgress a commandment. Rashi uses an agricultural example: "Do not say sell your field and buy a donkey" when your true intention is to secretly buy his field for your own benefit. The admonition concludes with the words, "you shall fear your Elokim, I am Hashem." Though one can fool others, Hashem is aware of everything that we do and think. The ibn Ezra warns that Hashem can punish this type of deceiver by making him deaf or blind.

In each of these examples, we find that the concluding words of the law involve one's cognizance of Hashem's presence. With honoring one's parents, we are reminded that our obligations fall first to honor Hashem's Shabbat, an indication that Hashem's Laws are more important than any personal obligation. In the case of piggul, we are reminded that it is a desecration of Hashem to go against the way that Hashem wishes the law to be followed. With the laws of the Harvest, we are reminded that our obligation to those who are lacking comes directly from our recognition of Hashem's actions. In our final case of the deaf or blind person, we are cautioned to control our actions even if they will never be discovered by the person whom we harm. We are to remember that Hashem sees our actions and understands our intentions even when we think they are hidden to others. There are many more similar examples that teach us the same lessons from our parasha.

Our actions are a way in which we can emulate Hashem. Perhaps that is the message of this parasha. Hashem is holy, unique, perfect. We must constantly evaluate our own actions to see if they encourage us to be more holy, unique (Hashem's standards compared to the world's standards), and perfect. May we strive to reach that goal. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
SICHA OF HARAV BARUCH GIGI

Translated by David Strauss

Edited by Sarah Rudolph

Parashot Acharei Mot and Kedoshim both discuss sins related to the privilege granted to us to dwell in the Land of Israel. We are told that commission of these sins will lead to a situation in which the land will "vomit" us out and we will no longer be able to dwell in it. However, we must note the fundamental difference between chapters 18 and 20, which are in different parashot but parallel each other.

In the concluding verses of Parashat Acharei

Mot, we read: "Do not defile yourselves in any of these [things], for in all these the nations are defiled, which I cast out from before you. And the land was defiled, and I visited its iniquity upon it, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. And you, you shall keep My statutes and My ordinances, and do not do any of these abominations; neither the home-born, nor the stranger that sojourns among you -- for all these abominations have the men of the land done, that were before you, and the land was defiled -- and [thus] the land will not vomit you out also, when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you." (Vayikra 18:24-28)

This warning, in chapter 18, is formulated as a general injunction to all the inhabitants of the land. The essence of the warning is refraining from evil with regard to forbidden sexual relations, whose punishment is the expulsion of the land's inhabitants. The land is unable to contain inhabitants who transgress these prohibitions.

The warning at the end of Parashat Kedoshim is formulated differently: "You shall keep all My statutes, and all My ordinances, and do them, and [thus] the land, where I bring you to dwell therein, will not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am casting out before you; for they did all these [things], and therefore I became disgusted with them. And I have said to you: You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the Lord your God, who has set you apart from the peoples." (Vayikra 20:22-24)

Here the emphasis is radically different -- it is not a question of the land's inability to contain its inhabitants due to their sins; rather, God is the one who punishes and expels the inhabitants of the land because He has had enough of their sins. Accordingly, the addressees of the warning also change: chapter 18 addressed a general warning to all the inhabitants of the land, including the Israelites; here, the warning is specifically directed to the Israelites. They are cautioned that God is bringing them specifically into the Land of Israel, in order for them to dwell there, and that He is giving them laws and statutes that will enable them to do so. Here, their continued residence in the land is contingent upon doing the will of God, not upon avoiding defilement of the land.

What led to this change between the two parashot? It stands to reason that this shift relates to what came in the interim, namely, the attribute of holiness, and the commandments derived from it, which were given to the people of Israel in chapter 19: "And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy." (Vayikra 19:1-2)

After receiving the commandment of holiness, the people of Israel were set apart from the nations.

They were no longer to be judged solely on their ability to (passively) refrain from evil, as in chapter 18; they were also charged with (actively) doing good and emulating God. And on this obligation, God Himself would keep watch -- as described in chapter 20.

The holiness invoked here is not a description of the state of the Jewish people. It is not a statement and declaration of fact -- "Just as He is holy, so you are holy" -- but an obligation and demand that they must sanctify themselves. Indeed, all expressions of holiness express a call towards progress and process: "And say to them: You shall be holy" (Vayikra 19:2); "sanctify yourselves and be holy" (20:7); "and you shall be holy to Me" (20:26).

Only in God do we find a state of perpetual sanctity: "For I the Lord your God am holy" (Vayikra 19:2). Man, in contrast, must constantly be on the move, always ascending and progressing in holiness.

This process of progression is intrinsic to human nature. Each of us is on a lifelong journey towards the unattainable goal of cleaving to God. The fact that the goal is unattainable does not prevent us from progressing; rather, it imposes upon us a perpetual obligation to rise in holiness. This idea appears in the Mishna in Keilim, which enumerates "ten sanctities," each more inward than the other -- a hierarchy of sanctity that invites a person on a journey to progress in the realm of holiness, from one level to the next, towards God: "There are ten [grades of] holiness: the land of Israel is holier than all other lands... Cities that are walled are holier... The area within the wall [of Jerusalem] is holier... the Temple Mount is holier... the cheil is holier... the women's court is holier... the court of Israelites is holier... the court of the priests is holier... the area between the porch (ulam) and the altar is holier... the heikhal is holier... the Holy of Holies is holier..." (Keilim 1:6-9)

From the outermost circle, one proceeds inward and approaches the holiest place -- a progression that is ostensibly "geographical," a walk in actual space, but whose essence is a spiritual journey toward ever-increasing sanctity. This is the proper attitude to the call to emulate the Creator and cleave to His ways -- not standing still, in satisfaction with the level already attained or with a sense of helplessness in the face of an incomparably lofty goal, but a constant progression.

Two further points of difference between the parallel chapters must be noted in order to better understand the nature of sanctity. The prohibitions of forbidden sexual relations are repeated in both chapters, but with different emphases. Chapter 18 primarily addresses forbidden relations within the family: "Each of you shall not approach any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness. I am the Lord." (Vayikra 18:6)

These transgressions usually come hand in

hand with extensive moral corruption, for only deep corruption could allow the breaking of the clear and natural boundaries within a family. This is implied by the warning that opens the section: "After the deeds of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and after the deeds of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, you shall not do; and you shall not walk in their statutes." (Vayikra 18:3)

Separation from impurity and basic prohibitions constitutes a distancing from the ways of Egypt and Canaan -- the two sons of Cham, the son who uncovered his father's nakedness. Shem, certainly, had no part in this event, for he was familiar with the worlds of sanctity. But even Yefet, who was not a man of holiness but was concerned with the development of the aesthetic side of humanity, abhorred Cham's act, which was an assault on the most basic levels of morality and humanity.

But the prohibitions of forbidden relations in chapter 20, which follow the commandment of holiness, are different. Rashi explains the commandment of holiness in this regard: "'You shall be holy' -- [This means:] be separate from the forbidden sexual relations [that were just mentioned] and from sin. For wherever you find a fence against such relations, you also find [mention of] holiness. [Thus, a kohen is told not to marry] 'a woman who is a harlot, or profaned' (Vayikra 21:7), [and in the next verse:] 'for I, the Lord, who sanctifies you[, am holy]'; 'He shall not profane his seed... I, the Lord, sanctify him' (ibid. 15); 'they shall be holy' (ibid. 6), [followed by:] '[they shall not marry] 'a woman who is a harlot, or profaned (chalala).'" (Rashi Vayikra 19:2)

We are not dealing here with prohibitions which are in themselves clear-cut impurities, such as those in chapter 18; these are prohibitions of a different type. A relationship between a High Priest and a chalala may not be "impure" in itself, but it is forbidden because it is not a fitting marital relationship for one who exists in the world of holiness.

The Ramban takes a further step up the ladder of sanctity: "Therefore, after detailing the matters which He prohibited altogether, Scripture came and commanded a general matter: that we should be separate [i.e., practice moderation, even] from those [matters] that are permitted." (Ramban, Vayikra 19:2)

This is not a matter of additional prohibitions, but of the idea of "sanctify yourself through that which is permitted to you." (Yevamot 20a) even regarding permitted matters, there is an obligation to minimize them and thereby sanctify oneself. In a similar statement, the Gemara tells us that a certain enactment was instituted so that "Torah scholars will not be found with their wives as [often as] roosters" (Berakhot 21a). The aspiration for sanctity entails control and refraining from one's desires even in the permitted realm.

Thus these chapters trace a journey from

impurity, which comes from the basic prohibitions that relate to man as a human being, to sanctity, and finally to sanctification even within what is permitted. It is therefore clear why the death penalty is imposed on one who transgresses the prohibitions of forbidden sexual relations: one who engages in impurity while involved with holiness is not worthy of this world at all.

We also find the prohibition of Molekh in both sections, yet its placement within each section indicates a fundamental difference. In chapter 18, it appears at the end of the section, as an appendix to the prohibitions of forbidden relations. There is a degree of similarity between the practices of Molekh, in which children are used to satisfy a person's spiritual cravings, and the prohibited relations in one turns to a family member to satisfy physical desires; however, the main point of the parasha relates to the basic limits on a person in the realm of physicality.

In contrast, in chapter 20, the prohibition of Molekh opens the chapter and appears as its first commandment. In light of our discussion of the attribute of holiness, this is understandable: we are not talking here about satisfying a person's lusts, but of exploiting family members in order to advance in the realm of holiness, which is forbidden not only because of the damage to those around him but because the approach is so inherently wrong. There must be a clear demarcation in the realms of sanctity regarding which acts are and are not permitted in order to ascend; therefore, the prohibition opens the parasha as a general directive to all who enter the realm of sanctity.

Regarding this prohibition, the Torah emphasizes the role of "the people of the land": "Moreover, you shall say to the children of Israel: Any one of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that gives of his offspring to Molekh; he shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. And I will set My face against that man, and I will cut him off from among his people, because he has given of his offspring to Molekh, to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name." (Vayikra 20:2-3)

One who lives in holiness must abhor and expunge such acts from the camp, and so an obligation is cast upon all of society to expel such persons from its midst.

We find the importance of society on the positive side as well, in the call to sanctify and progress, as we see in Rashi's remarks at the beginning of Parashat Kedoshim: "[The words 'all the congregation'] teach that this section was proclaimed in full assembly, because most of the bodies [i.e., fundamental teachings] of the Torah are dependent on it." (Rashi, Vayikra 19:2)

This passage was stated in the context of an assembly of the people, in the presence of all segments of the nation. Neither the aspiration to draw near and

ascend the ladder of sanctity, nor the obligation to punish those who harm this process, is entrusted to individuals alone. This is a task that is incumbent upon all of society, to advance in holiness and to build a holy society. This is the next level that emerges from the verses: "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." (Shemot 19:6)

"And your camp shall be holy." (Devarim 23:15)

Thus, these parashot describe the continuous journey of man's progress in the realm of holiness -- beginning with withdrawal and distancing from the worlds of impurity, moving on to the prohibitions of sanctity and to sanctification of the permitted as well, and culminating in the building of a wholly sanctified society. *[This sicha was delivered by Harav Baruch Gigi on Shabbat Parashat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim 5783.]*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Leprosy, the subject of one of our parshiot this week, is traditionally associated with the sin of slander. Thus, there is a similarity between the Hebrew word for leprosy - metzora - and the Hebrew words for speaking evil about another - motzei shem ra. The Torah reminds us of the danger of bad speech.

The ability to speak has the capacity to raise a human being above the lower animal world. Hence, Rabbi Yehudah Halevi labels the human being as medaber, one who speaks. Speech is what sets the human being apart.

But, the greater the potential to do good, the greater the possibility for that potential to turn into evil. Speech can raise one to the highest level, but if abused, it can sink us to the lowest depth.

Indeed, injurious speech has enormous ramifications. Although when we were kids, we would say "sticks and bones can break my bones, but names can never harm me," it is actually not true. Words and name-calling can actually hurt deeply. It also should be remembered that while a word is a word and a deed is a deed, words lead to deeds. Once a word has been said, it is almost impossible to take back, for a spoken word spreads to others in ways that can never be undone.

A rabbinic tale: A rabbi was once asked, what is the most expensive meat. He responded, "tongue." And the next day the rabbi was asked what is the least expensive meat. Here too he responded, "tongue." Such is the challenge of speech. One that the Torah reminds us about this week, and that we should all take to heart. ©2017 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

