

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is so impressive about the Torah is that it both articulates the highest of high ideals, and at the same time speaks to us as human beings. If we were angels it would be easy to love one another. But we are not. An ethic that commands us to love our enemies, without any hint as to how we are to achieve this, is simply unliveable. Instead, the Torah sets out a realistic programme. By being honest with one another, talking

things through, we may be able to achieve reconciliation -- not always, to be sure, but often. How much distress and even bloodshed might be spared if humanity heeded this simple command. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l* © 2026 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust [rabbisacks.org](http://rabbisacks.org)

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd you shall observe My statutes and My laws which people shall perform and shall live by them, I am the Lord." (Leviticus 18:5) Heaven and hell and the world to come are the bread and butter of most of the world's religions. In various shades and using different metaphors, the terrors of hell and the splendors of the kingdom of heaven are portrayed in living color: the Islamic paradise is the green of the gardens of Eden, and the Christian hell is black night and fiery red. The major focus of most religions -- from as far back as the Greek mythological figure, Charon, who ferried the dead from this world to the next, and the Egyptian bible, which was called the Book of the Dead, to the more contemporary Christianity, which venerates the cross of crucifixion and celebrates the resurrection of the founder of Christianity -- seems to be the world-to-come and the best way for each one to get there.

Judaism certainly accepts the idea of the world-to-come as a fundamental truth. Despite the absence of specific after-life references in the Torah, the introductory words to the Ethics of Our Fathers, probably the most popular of our Mishnayot and part of our Sabbath afternoon liturgy, declares that all of Israel has a share in the world-to-come. And although there may be no direct references to an after-life, there is an indisputable basis for the eternity of the soul in Genesis: "And God created the human in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). The human created in the divine image is more than a complex animal; he/she possesses a soul, a spirit, a psyche, a spark of the divine. And just as the Almighty is eternal, so must the divine spark within the human being be eternal, and so must that spark endow every human being with the gift of eternity. Hence death is not final; the human soul lives eternally in another dimension of existence, in the world of the spirit. And although the Torah doesn't go into specifics on the number of rooms in heaven or how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, it's clear that the world-to-come is taken for granted. Indeed, we need to go no further than chapter five in Genesis to find the best way, the Torah way, of looking at death: "And Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him." (Genesis 5:2)

The last stop for the human being is not the cemetery; it is rather the dimension to which God takes him, the world-to-come. Indeed, one of the most

common expressions for death in the Bible is that the individual was “gathered to his people,” was returned to join the souls of those loving family members who left this world for the other eternal dimension of life after life. This biblical phrase echoes the studies of Elizabeth Kubler Ross, who documents the experiences of many different patients from many different ethnic backgrounds who were declared clinically and medically dead, but were subsequently revived. They invariably tell of having felt an incredible peacefulness, of moving through a tunnel with a significant light emanating at the end of it, and having met close family and friends who had previously “died” and were now greeting them just beyond the dazzling light on the other side.

Nevertheless, it is fascinating that the Bible, unlike so many other traditions, not only does not record graphic descriptions of heaven and hell, but also does not even emphasize the importance of the world-to-come. One of the reasons why not may well be because a religion based on an after-life is generally predicated more on fear of death than on appreciation of life, fear of punishment rather than reverence for God. Moreover, the powerful and hypnotic spells that a description of otherworldly delights and castigations can bring casts over its adherents the kind of hysterical ecstasy which can lead to suicide bombers and wilful immolations. But most important of all, a religion which focuses on the other world has a tendency to downplay this world; after all, if this world is only temporary and the other world is eternal, it is hardly worth the effort to even attempt to right the wings of injustice and to alleviate the suffering of poverty and pain!

An even greater insight into this biblical truth is emphasized by the verse quoted: “And you shall observe My statutes and My laws which people shall perform and shall live by them, I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 18:5)

This phrase “you shall live by them” has been made to assume a cardinal position by the sages of the Talmud (Yoma 85b): “you shall live by them,” and not die by them: this is true even if it means violating a command as significant as the Sabbath in order to save the life of another human being!

Perhaps the reason why the Torah avoids all other worlds except ours is because it knows the dangers of exploiting the weaknesses, fears and fantasies of a beleaguered population by emphasizing for them the other worldly delights, causing them to forget present hardships and even court martyrdom. Our task is to make this world a better place – this land, this century, now – for the betterment of mankind.

In the opening law of his section on “Sanctifying God’s Name” in his monumental work, Mishneh Torah – a section in which we would expect the great legalist to praise martyrdom – Maimonides opens his discussion by generally forbidding the Jew to give up his life for the sake of a Torah commandment; there are only three exceptions to this rule, which are idolatry, murder and

sexual immorality (incest and adultery). In effect, says Maimonides, we sanctify God by living! The Torah, unlike the Egyptian Book of the Dead, is the Hebrew book of the Living. Life, not death, is the message of Judaism. Before we concern ourselves with paradise above, we have to create a paradise below. Jerusalem must become a city of righteousness, a city which teaches ethical monotheism and world peace in order for it to be considered a city of God. Many people erroneously think that the best way to sanctify the name of God (Kiddush Hashem) is through martyrdom, but the real sanctification emerges from how we bring holiness into this mundane, insane and sometimes ugly world. Maimonides describes and defines the highest fulfillment of sanctifying God’s name when a Torah scholar: “Speaks softly and kindly to all creatures, respects even those who denigrate him and comports his business dealings in good faith....” (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Yesodei Hatorah 5:10)

One of the key moments in Jewish history is Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his son Isaac when he obeys God’s command to bring his beloved child as a “whole burnt offering.” But despite all the existential anguish of the meaning of the divine request, the bottom line is that Abraham is then told “not to cast a hand upon the lad, not to do him any harm.” God concludes this nightmarish episode with the resounding message that He doesn’t wish Isaac to die for Him, but rather to live in dedication to His laws. And the sages of the Midrash refer to Isaac as the “unblemished whole burnt offering – olah temima,” after he descends from the mountain, living a life dedicated to the just and compassionate laws of God.

The central image of Christianity is the martyred death of its founder crucified on the cross; in contrast, the central image of Judaism is the six-cornered shield of David, who fought in order to live and rule, or the Sanctuary’s Menorah which symbolizes the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. Our goal is not so much to reach the other world, but is rather to transform this world into the peaceful and harmonious Garden of Eden.

When Rabbi Israel Salanter, the nineteenth-century founder of the Mussar movement, was confronted with a raging cholera epidemic one Yom Kippur, he knew that a decree to break the fast and eat in order to strengthen oneself would be met with disapproval. In David Frishman’s short story, “Three Who Ate,” based on a historical account of this episode, the sexton read the names of everyone who had died during the course of that terrible summer. The next morning, after the reading of the Torah, Rabbi Salanter announced that everyone must make Kiddush lest their fast make them susceptible to the disease. A murmur went through the congregation. Yom Kippur?! No one moved. Again, the rabbi commanded the worshippers to make Kiddush. Silence!

To the astonishment of the assembled, the rabbi asked for cake and wine, and called over two judges. In the presence of the entire congregation he made Kiddush, adding the blessing, "...who commanded us to live by them, my laws."

What makes Judaism different? Although our history has brought us again and again to the valley of death, we revel in and constantly celebrate our survival and our mission to repair and rectify this imperfect world.

"To live by them" means just that: to live. Thus, it's obvious why we are so driven and concerned with the survival of the Jewish State. In the end it's not the heavenly Jerusalem toward which we direct our passions, but the Jerusalem down below, the one with hills, pink-veined stones, and vibrant light. It is Jerusalem, the City of Return, to which we have come after two thousand years of exile; it is Jerusalem, the City of Life, which symbolizes our renaissance and rebirth; it is Jerusalem, the City of Peace, which expresses our aspirations for this world's redemption. Jerusalem was the place where Abraham took Isaac to near death and witnessed his return to life. Jerusalem is the place from where the Messiah will invigorate the entire world with the joy of re-creation. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Vayikra: Sacrifice, Sanctity & Silence, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase at [bit.ly/RiskinVayikra](http://bit.ly/RiskinVayikra). © 2026 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT"l**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he 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 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 B. Wein zt"l - 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

### **Touching Food**

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**I**n 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 DAVID LEVIN**

## **The Living Goat**

**P**arashiot Acharei Mot-Kedoshim begin with the service of the Kohein Gadol on Yom Kippur. One commandment to the Kohein Gadol involves the bringing of two he-goats to the Temple where a lottery was held to see which he-goat would be offered as a korban, sacrifice, to atone for the people's sins. The second he-goat was called the Living He-Goat, but this was only temporary. The Kohein Gadol would place his hands on the Living He-Goat, placing the sins of the people on that goat, and sending him with a messenger to a cliff where the goat would be pushed over the cliff to its death. This is where the term "scapegoat" originated. There are many laws concerning these two goats which need our attention.

The Torah states: "He (Aharon) shall take the two he-goats and stand them before Hashem, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Aharon shall place lots upon the two he-goats: one lot 'to Hashem' and one lot 'to Azazel.' Aharon shall bring near the He-Goat designated by lot 'to Hashem,' and he shall make it a sin offering. And the He-Goat designated by lot 'to Azazel' shall be stood alive before Hashem, to atone upon it, to send it to Azazel to the wilderness .... He shall slaughter the sin-offering He-Goat of the people, and bring its blood within the Curtain, he shall do with its blood as he had done with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it upon the Ark-cover and in front of the Ark-cover. Thus shall he bring atonement upon the Sanctuary for the impurities of the B'nei Yisrael, and for their willful sins among all their sins; and so shall he do for the Tent of Meeting that dwells with them amid their impurity .... He shall go out to the Mizbei'ach (Altar) that is before Hashem, and make atonement upon it: He shall take from the blood of the bull and from the blood of the He-Goat and place it on the horns of the Altar all around. He shall sprinkle upon it from the blood with his finger seven times; and he shall purify it and sanctify it from the impurities of the B'nei Yisrael. When he is finished atoning for the Sanctuary, the Tent of Meeting, and the Altar, he shall bring the Living He-Goat near. Aharon shall lean his two hands upon the head of the Living He-Goat and confess upon it all the iniquities of the B'nei Yisrael, and all their rebellious sins among all their sins, and place them upon

the head of the He-Goat and send it with a timely man to the desert. The He-Goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities to a cut land (cliff), and he should send away the He-Goat to the desert."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin asks why we refer to both he-goats as sin-offerings. Sin-offerings require the sprinkling of the blood, confession of the sin, and the burning of the parts of the sacrifice on the Altar. This is not true for the goats on Yom Kippur, which do not require confession (of each sin since it is every sin of the nation), but does require the sprinkling of the blood on the covering of the Ark and on the Curtain and the Gold Altar, and the burning of the parts on the outside Altar, while the rest of the animal is burned outside the camp. This is not true also for the he-goat "to Azazel." These he-goats are really one, as both together constitute the requirements of one sacrifice.

The two he-goats are also treated differently after the lottery had been performed. The animal that received the lottery designation "to Hashem" was prepared for slaughter while the animal with the designation "to Azazel" was placed on the side. The he-goat chosen "to Hashem" was slaughtered as a sin-offering to atone for the willful sins of the people. Later, the Kohein Gadol would place both hands firmly on the head of the he-goat designated "to Azazel," placing all the iniquities, rebellious sins, and all the sins of the people onto the head of that he-goat. It would then be sent into the wilderness with a messenger to be pushed over a cliff. This act does not produce atonement or forgiveness for these sins.

It would appear to be unusual that the Torah presents us with a service to Hashem in which the animal is not offered as a sacrifice in the Temple nor is its service visible from the Temple. This is certainly not at a time when the Temple, either as a temporary structure or as the First or Second Temples, did not exist. This section of the Torah discusses the Kohein Gadol's role in the Yom Kippur service in the Temple or the Mishkan (the temporary Temple). The Living Goat was not slaughtered, its blood was not sprinkled on the Aron Kodesh or the Curtains, or the Altar. The parts of the Living Goat were not burned on the Altar, and its ashes were not collected the next morning.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains the meaning of having this goat always referred to as the Living He-Goat: "For just in this "living" lies the significance of the moment and of the procedure. All the iniquities, sins and transgressions of the past have their roots entirely in the fact that we remained 'a Living He-Goat standing before Hashem,' that, instead of using the power of resistance which is given to us against the lure of our senses, we turn it against Hashem and His Sanctuary. Placed at the threshold of the Sanctuary of His Torah to make the decision, we fight shy of giving up our selfish living for our own pleasure, and, repulsed by, and afraid of, the demands of Hashem's laws of morality,

we hold ourselves stubbornly against Him as a Living Goat. Therefore, 'Aharon shall lean his two hands upon the head of the Living He-Goat and confess upon it all the iniquities of the B'nei Yisrael, and all their rebellious sins among all their sins,' that is why he has to realize that it is on the head of a Living He-Goat that he has to lay all the sins of the past."

There is a distinction between what the he-goat "to Hashem" and the he-goat "to Azazel" are intended to accomplish. The Ramban explains that "all offerings (the bull, the ram, and the he-goat "to Hashem") were brought for acceptance 'upon the fires of Hashem, [which burnt on the Altar], and thus they effected pardon and atonement. But this [goat that was sent away to Azazel], since it was not for Hashem, and the recipient thereof [i.e. Sammael] has no power to offer atonement or pardon, therefore the goat merely carries the people's sins away, and [the accusing angel] must answer 'Amen' against his will .... That was the reason why the thread of crimson wool turned white at the time that he pushed it over the cliff, when it was broken in pieces." Compare this to the Tashlich of today.

As with the he-goats, it is not enough for us to atone for our sins, we must also distance ourselves from that behavior which caused us to sin. May we prove successful in that task. © 2026 Rabbi D. Levin

#### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

### Migdal Ohr

"Do not do like the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelled, and like the actions of the land of Canaan where I am bringing you, shall you not do, and you shall not follow their laws." (Vayikra 12:2) The Torah equates the actions of Egypt and Canaan, in that they were both evil. Rashi adds that both Egypt and Canaan were the most depraved nations in the world, and specifically where the Jews lived, was always the worst area. What was the evil these nations perpetrated? They were involved in promiscuity and improper relationships.

If, however, they both did the same things, why was it necessary to mention both of them? Simply mention one and we will know that the Jews are commanded not to sink into depravity and licentiousness. What is added by mentioning both Mitzrayim and Canaan?

The end of the posuk tells us not to follow their laws, and the Ibn Ezra comments that one should not become accustomed to doing these sins until they become a common practice in his mind. This can help us answer the question of why they were both mentioned.

Egypt was a land steeped in illicit relations, but it stemmed from their base desires. They did not restrain themselves nor deny themselves the pleasures they wished. Canaan took it one step further. They, too, were steeped in physical desires, but, as the Ibn Ezra said, they took it to an extreme and codified it in their laws.

While the Egyptians didn't deny themselves their desires, they also didn't whitewash them and pretend they were doing something laudable and praiseworthy. They understood they were acting like animals, and perhaps thought of themselves as little more than human animals, so they followed their passions.

Those who lived in Canaan, though, made such improper relationships legal. They felt they were being considerate and fair to all by encouraging engaging in these acts, and believed themselves to be enlightened and lofty. This was the additional warning Hashem gave to us. Don't be like the Egyptians who give into their desires, nor like the Canaanites who do the same things but justify and rationalize their sins.

Sarah was kidnapped by Pharaoh in Egypt and Avimelech in the area of Canaan. Pharaoh understood that his people were depraved, but in Avimelech's area, it was normal to ask a visitor about the woman he traveled with, instead of whether he had food or lodging. This indicated a worse degree of temptation, because if a person doesn't consider it a sin, he will never repent or resist his urges. To them, such relationships were normalized.

Instead, we as Jews are commanded to do what Hashem judges to be correct, and to follow HIS laws. He is our G-d, and He knows we are able to overcome the animalistic desires that other nations can't - or won't.

*The young man approached his Rosh Yeshiva. It had been several years since he had married and moved away and he was excited about the visit.*

*"How is everything?" inquired the Dean.*

*"Baruch Hashem," replied the fellow, "my job is good and my home is comfortable. But there is something that bothers me. I don't feel the "kedusha," the spirituality in my neighborhood to be the best. It's not like Yeshiva and I think people could be more spiritually sensitive." He assumed the sage would tell him to find a new place to live. He was not ready for what his rebbi DID tell him: "So, YOU add kedusha to your neighborhood."*

*-- It was up to him. Why hadn't he thought of that? © 2026 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr*

#### RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

### Shabbat Shalom Weekly

A few weeks ago a friend of mine was telling me, with no small measure of exasperation, about a conversation that had transpired around the table the previous Shabbat.

His cousin, who had just managed to scrape together every penny he could find to buy a house here in South Florida, was discussing the hardships of trying to buy a home in a challenging environment; the red hot real estate market, ever increasing inflation, and rising interest rates. Not being wealthy, he was thankful that he was able to put the funds together to finally buy a home.

Eventually, the conversation at the table turned

to: "What would you do if you won a hundred million dollars in the lottery?"

His cousin began by saying that he would give his business partner 10 million dollars so that he wouldn't feel left behind, and then proceeded to list the charitable endeavors that he would initiate. My friend's wife responded that she would take the money and buy a jet to travel anytime and anywhere, and hire a permanent private chef to handle all their meals at home.

My friend, who is a very successful businessman, was both dismayed and a little shocked by his wife's statement. After all, by any measure they were already living a pretty lavish lifestyle – a very expensive home, luxury cars, exotic vacations, and generally spending freely on themselves. My friend could not understand how his wife had such a shallow value system. Of course, this led to a protracted argument and his decision to share with me what had happened and ask me for advice.

I explained to him that someone who always wants "more" isn't happy with or appreciative of what they have already. Even worse, the reason for this is because they feel that whatever they have is "owed" to them. For example, if parents decide to give their child a car the appropriate reaction should be, "Wow, this is amazing! Thank you so much!" However, if the child's reaction is, "Ugh, I'm going to be so embarrassed driving this 'old lady' car; why couldn't you have gotten me something cooler? Adam's parents got him a brand new convertible." The child is rejecting his parents' generosity and his own good fortune in favor of resentment, entitlement, and misery.

This attitude leads to a perpetual state of unhappiness because when a person believes that he is always owed more, nothing will ever be enough. Such dissatisfaction in one's life can develop into bitterness, depression, or loneliness (as the person is miserable to be around).

I explained to my friend that, while he may not be able to change his wife's outlook, his responsibility was to make sure that his kids didn't adopt the same attitude of being owed a lavish lifestyle. He needs to teach his children that whatever they receive is a gift and something for which they should be appreciative.

I suggested that if he wanted to raise happy children who would develop into well-adjusted adults, then they must learn that the world doesn't revolve around them. One of the hardest personalities with which to have a personal relationship is a narcissist. Everything is always about them, and it renders them almost incapable of selfless giving – which is the bedrock of healthy relationships.

Then, I told him about a former student of mine who had become fabulously wealthy through real estate investments. He makes sure that his kids stay "simple" and without expectations. He does this by example and always flies coach, takes modest vacations, and spends

much of his time, energy, and resources building the local community schools and synagogues. He doesn't buy himself (or his children) designer clothes or the absolute latest technological gadget.

In this way, he exhibits that the wealth with which he was blessed is a gift to be shared with others – and not solely to be used in an endless pursuit of physical pleasures or to display one's success to the world. Unsurprisingly, his children appreciate what they have, are well adjusted, modest, and happy – without a hint of egocentricity.

Of course, this week's Torah portion gives us an important lesson in this area. This week's portion is called Kedoshim, which has the Hebrew root word kadosh – usually translated as "holy." It begins:

"And God spoke to Moses saying: Speak to all the congregation of Israel, and say to them, become holy; for I Hashem your God, am holy. Everyone should revere their mother and father, and you should keep my Sabbaths, I am Hashem your God" (Leviticus 19:1-3).

This week's portion begins with the Almighty exhorting the Jewish people to become "kadosh" for He is "kadosh." As stated, the word kadosh is commonly translated as "holy." In English, the meaning of the word holy is generally understood as being "connected to God or religion." In other words, we generally measure holiness vis-à-vis a person's relationship with God.

But a simple review of the verse (become holy; for I Hashem your God, am holy) shows that we cannot understand the word kadosh to mean "holy." After all, the Almighty cannot be "connected" to Himself. Perhaps even more telling, the Torah often refers to a prostitute as a kadesha (see Genesis 38:21). Obviously the Torah is not extolling her "holiness."

So we are left with some fairly serious questions: What is the meaning of kadosh? What exactly is the obligation to become kadosh and how does one strive to achieve it? In addition, everything in the Torah is carefully juxtaposed, so how is the next verse, which commands reverence for one's parents, connected to this idea of being kadosh?

The word kadosh actually means to set aside or separate. For example, in a Jewish marriage ceremony the man indicates his intention to marry his wife by saying that she will be "mekudeshes" to him. This means that she is separated and designated for him alone, to be his wife. By contrast, a prostitute has also separated and designated herself; to a life of licentiousness.

So what exactly does it mean that God is described as kadosh? This is a very deep concept and perhaps it is easier to understand what it really means as it relates to something we, as humans, must strive to achieve.

A baby is born very self-centered; everything is about satisfying his own needs and desires. This is only natural as a baby only senses himself. As a child matures, hopefully, he begins to recognize the outside

world and his place within a broader perspective. This process of becoming less and less self-centered is the process of removing oneself from egocentricity.

In other words, by commanding the Jewish people to be kadosh, the Almighty is asking us to separate ourselves from our self-centered desires and to focus outwardly. The perfect example of such a separation is God Himself.

The Almighty is perfect with no intrinsic needs. His actions in creating the world had nothing to do with any perceived needs of His own; rather it is all a function of His wish to bestow the ultimate good on humanity. When it comes to God, there are no self-serving actions, only actions directed for others. Therefore, God is kadosh because His actions are "separate" from Himself.

We are likewise commanded to become kadosh like Him. Rashi (ad loc) explains that this means separating from forbidden intimate relationships. As we discussed last week, this is why this Torah portion immediately follows the list of forbidden relationships. A person's strongest desire is in this area because it is so self-serving. Exercising self-control in such cases is one of the keys to separating ourselves from egocentricity.

This also explains why the Torah immediately follows the exhortation of being kadosh with the commandment for reverence to our parents.

Many, if not most, children view their mother as their chef, chauffeur, butler, maid, and personal shopper, while their father is the ATM machine that makes it all possible. That is to say, their world revolves around an "it's all about me" attitude. Some parents are even foolish enough to perpetuate this fantasy – indulging their children in every possible pleasure or desire. This is very dangerous to our children's emotional wellbeing and to their future capability of maintaining healthy relationships.

The most important lesson that we must teach our children is that we do everything for them out of love – not because the world revolves around them. The antidote to a child's egocentrism is to have great reverence for one's parents. We owe our parents for everything they do for us, because nothing is "owed" to us. We have to break the sense of self and learn to focus outwardly, just like the Almighty – and in this way we can begin to become kadosh like Him. © 2026 Rabbi Y. Zweig & [shabbatshalom.org](http://shabbatshalom.org)

**SHLOMO KATZ**

## Hama'ayan

**A**haron 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](http://torah.org)

