Kedoshim 5776 Volume XXIII Number 35

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The other day I was having a conversation with a Jewish intellectual and the question came up, as it often does, as to the nature of Jewish identity. What are we? What makes us Jewish? This has been one of the persisting debates about Jewish life ever since the nineteenth century. Until then, people by and large knew who and what Jews were. They were the heirs of an ancient nation who, in the Sinai desert long ago, made a covenant with G-d and, with greater or lesser success, tried to live by it ever since. They were G-d's people.

Needless to say, this upset others. The Greeks thought they were the superior race. They called non-Greeks "barbarians," a word intended to resemble the sound made by sheep. The Romans likewise thought themselves better than others, Christians and Muslims both held, in their different ways, that they, not the Jews, were the true chosen of G-d. The result was many centuries of persecution. So when Jews were given the chance to become citizens of the newly secular nation states of Europe, they seized it with open arms. In many cases they abandoned their faith and religious practice. But they were still regarded as Jews.

What, though, did this mean? It could not mean that they were a people dedicated to G-d, since many of them no longer believed in G-d or acted as if they did. So it came to mean a race. Benjamin Disraeli, converted to Christianity by his father as a young child, thought of his identity in those terms. He once wrote, "All is race -- there is no other truth,"[1] and said about himself, in response to a taunt by the Irish politician Daniel O'Connell, "Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the right honorable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the temple of Solomon."

The trouble was that hostility to Jews did not cease despite all that Europe claimed by way of enlightenment, reason, the pursuit of science and emancipation. It could now, though, no longer be defined by religion, since neither Jews nor Europeans used that as the basis of identity. So Jews became hated for their race, and in the 1870s a new word was coined to express this: antisemitism. This was dangerous. So long as Jews were defined by religion, Christians could work to convert them. You can change your religion. But you cannot change your race. Anti-Semites could only work, therefore, for the expulsion or extermination of the Jews.

Ever since the Holocaust it has become taboo to use the word "race" in polite society in the West. Yet secular Jewish identity persists, and there seems no other way of referring to it. So a new term has come to be used instead: ethnicity, which means roughly what "race" meant in the nineteenth century. The Wikipedia definition of ethnicity is "a category of people who identify with each other based on common ancestral, social, cultural, or national experiences."

The trouble is that ethnicity is where we came from, not where we are going to. It involves culture and cuisine, a set of memories meaningful to parents but ever less so to their children. In any case, there is no one Jewish ethnicity: there are ethnicities in the plural. That is what makes Sefardi Jews different from their Ashkenazi cousins, and Sefardi Jews from North Africa and the Middle East different from those whose families originally came from Spain and Portugal.

Besides which, what is often thought of as Jewish ethnicity is often not even Jewish in origin. It is a lingering trace of what Jews absorbed from a local non-Jewish culture: Polish dress, Russian music, North African food, and the German-Jewish dialect known as Yiddish along with its Spanish-Jewish counterpart, Ladino. Ethnicity is often a set of borrowings thought of as Jewish because their origins have been forgotten.

Judaism is not an ethnicity and Jews are not an ethnic group. Go to the Western Wall in Jerusalem and you will see Jews of every colour and culture under the sun, the Beta Israel from Ethiopia, the Bene Israel from India, Bukharan Jews from central Asia, Iraqi, Berber, Egyptian, Kurdish and Libyan Jews, the Temanim from Yemen, alongside American Jews from Russia, South African Jews from Lithuania, and British Jews from German-speaking Poland. Their food, music, dress,

[1] Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography (1852), p. 331.

TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM
The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.
TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL (973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM

customs and conventions are all different. Jewishness is not an ethnicity but a bricolage of multiple ethnicities.

Besides which, ethnicity does not last. If Jews are merely an ethnic group, they will experience the fate of all such groups, which is that they disappear over time. Like the grandchildren of Irish, Polish, German and Norwegian immigrants to America, they merge into the melting pot. Ethnicity lasts for three generations, for as long as children can remember immigrant grandparents and their distinctive ways. Then it begins to fade, for there is no reason for it not to. If Jews had been no more than an ethnicity, they would have died out long ago, along with the Canaanites, Perizzites and Jebusites, known only to students of antiquity and having left no mark on the civilisation of the West.

So when, in 2000, a British Jewish research institute proposed that Jews in Britain be defined as an ethnic group and not a religious community, it took a non-Jewish journalist, Andrew Marr, to state the obvious: 'All this is shallow water,' he wrote, 'and the further in you wade, the shallower it gets.' He continued: The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us. They have had their Bible, one of the great imaginative works of the human spirit. They have been victim of the worst modernity can do, a mirror for Western madness. Above all they have had the story of their cultural and genetic survival from the Roman Empire to the 2000s, weaving and thriving amid uncomprehending, hostile European tribes.

This story, their post-Bible, their epic of bodies, not words, involved an intense competitive hardening of generations which threw up, in the end, a blaze of individual geniuses in Europe and America. Outside painting, Morris dancing and rap music, it's hard to think of many areas of Western endeavour where Jews haven't been disproportionately successful. For non-Jews, who don't believe in a people being chosen by G-d, the lesson is that generations of people living on their wits and hard work, outside the more comfortable mainstream certainties, will seed Einsteins and Wittgensteins, Trotskys and Seiffs. Culture matters . . . The Jews really have been different; they have enriched the world and challenged it.[2]

Marr himself is neither Jewish nor a religious believer, but his insight points us in the direction of this week's parsha, which contains one of the most important sentences in Judaism: "Speak to the whole assembly of Israel and say to them: Be holy because I, the Lord your G-d, am holy." Jews were and remain the people summoned to holiness.

What does this mean? Rashi reads it in context. The previous chapter was about forbidden sexual relationships. So is the next chapter. So he understands it as meaning, be careful not to put yourself in the way of temptation to forbidden sex. Ramban reads it more broadly. The Torah forbids certain activities and permits others. When it says "Be holy" it means, according to Ramban, practice self-restraint even in the domain of the permitted. Don't be a glutton, even if what you are eating is kosher. Don't be an alcoholic even if what you are drinking is kosher wine. Don't be, in his famous phrase, a naval bireshut ha-Torah, "a scoundrel with Torah license."

These are localised interpretations. They are what the verse means in its immediate context. But it clearly means something larger as well, and the chapter itself tells us what this is. To be holy is to love your neighbour and to love the stranger. It means not stealing, lying, or deceiving others. It means not standing idly by when someone else's life is in danger. It means not cursing the deaf or putting a stumbling block before the blind, that is, insulting or taking advantage of others even when they are completely unaware of it – because G-d is not unaware of it.

It means not planting your field with different kinds of seed, not crossbreeding your livestock or wearing clothes made of a forbidden mixture of wool and linen–or as we would put it nowadays, respecting the integrity of the environment. It means not conforming with whatever happens to be the idolatry of the time – and every age has its idols. It means being honest in business, doing justice, treating your employees well, and sharing your blessings (in those days, parts of the harvest) with others.

It means not hating people, not bearing a grudge or taking revenge. If someone has done you wrong, don't hate them. Remonstrate with them. Let them know what they have done and how it has hurt you, give them a chance to apologise and make amends, and then forgive them.

Above all, "Be holy" means, "Have the courage to be different." That is the root meaning of kadosh in Hebrew. It means something distinctive and set apart. "Be holy for I the Lord your G-d am holy" is one of the most counter-intuitive sentences in the whole of religious literature. How can we be like G-d? He is infinite, we are finite. He is eternal, we are mortal. He is vaster than the universe, we are a mere speck on its

[2] Andrew Marr, The Observer, Sunday May 14, 2000.

surface. Yet, says the Torah, in one respect we can be.

G-d is in but not of the world. So we are called on to be in but not of the world. We don't worship nature. We don't follow fashion. We don't behave like everyone else just because everyone else does. We don't conform. We dance to a different music. We don't live in the present. We remember our people's past and help build our people's future. Not by accident does the word kadosh also have the meaning of marriage, kiddushin, because to marry means to be faithful to one another, as G-d pledges himself to be faithful to us and we to him, even in the hard times.

To be holy means to bear witness to the presence of G-d in our, and our people's, lives. Israel – the Jewish people – is the people who in themselves give testimony to One beyond ourselves. To be Jewish means to live in the conscious presence of the G-d we can't see but can sense as the force within ourselves urging us to be more courageous, just and generous than ourselves. That's what Judaism's rituals are about: reminding us of the presence of the Divine.

Every individual on earth has an ethnicity. But only one people was ever asked collectively to be holy. That, to me, is what it is to be a Jew.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You shall love your friend as yourself – I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18) These words — "You shall love your friend as yourself" – are designated by the renowned talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva as "the greatest rule of the Torah" (J.T. Nedarim 30b), the bedrock of our entire ethical system.

And 50 years after the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabbi Akiva was considered one of the most illustrious of the rabbinical decisors, who led a major talmudic academy which could boast a student body of tens of thousands.

Indeed, it became the first yeshivat hesder in history, whose students fought valiantly against the Roman conquerors, hoping to restore the Holy City of Jerusalem, to enthrone their General Bar Kokhba as King Messiah, to rebuild the Holy Temple and to usher in the time of Redemption.

Alas, the redemption was not to be; the kingdom of Bar Kokhba lasted only three and a half years; Bar Kokhba himself was killed and the aborted Judean rebellion ended in tragic failure.

The Talmud (B.T. Yevamot 62b) records that 24,000 disciples of R. Akiva lost their lives due to askera, an Aramaic term which Rashi explains as a plague of diphtheria; but Rav Hai Gaon maintains much more logically that they died by the sword (sicarii is sword in Greek) in the Bar Kokhba wars as well as in the Hadrianic persecutions which followed the military defeat.

The initial mourning period observed during these days of the counting of the omer – from the end of Passover until Lag Ba'omer (the 33rd day of the barley offering, when the disciples of R. Akiva stopped dying) – memorializes the death of these valiant young martyrs, so anxious to restore Jewish sovereignty in Judea.

And the Talmud, morally interested in discovering an ethical flaw that might justify the failure of this heroic attempt, maintained that it was "because the students of R. Akiva did not honor each other properly, that they were involved in petty jealousies and rivalries causing them to face their Roman foes from a position of disunity and internal strife (Yevamot, ibid).

But how could this be? After all, R. Akiva's major teaching was that "you shall love your friend as yourself – this is the greatest rule of the Torah." Could it be that the foremost Master – Rosh Yeshiva R. Akiva, did not succeed in inculcating within his disciples his most important maxim, the one teaching which he considered to be quintessential Torah? Allow me to suggest a number of responses. First of all, one can say that it was only after the death of the 24,000, and the understanding that the tragedy occurred because of their "causeless animosity" amongst themselves (sinat hinam), that R. Akiva began to emphasize loving one's fellow as the greatest rule of the Torah.

Secondly, the Talmud (B.T. Gittin 56b) has R. Akiva apply a shockingly disparaging verse to Rav Yohanan ben Zakkai, who close to seven decades earlier had left the besieged Jerusalem at the 11th hour to stand before Vespasian and trade away sovereignty over Jerusalem and hegemony over the Holy Temple, for the city of Yavne and the Sanhedrin of 71 wise elders: "oft-times G-d moves wise men backwards and turns their wisdom into foolishness" (Isaiah 44:25).

You must remember that Yohanan ben Zakkai had been the teacher of the two teachers of R. Akiva: R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (R. Eliezer Hagadol) and R.

Yehoshua ben Hananya. And R. Akiva was not attacking ben Zakkai's ideology but he was rather disparaging his persona, very much ad hominem: "G-d had moved ben Zakkai backwards and transformed his wisdom into foolishness!" No matter how many times R. Akiva might have emphasized "Love your neighbor as yourself," this one-time "put-down" of a Torah scholar by R. Akiva unfortunately may have caused his disciples to overlook his general teaching and learn from his harsh words. Herein lies a crucial lesson for every educator: our students learn not from what we tell them during our formal lessons but rather from what they see us do and hear us say, even, and especially if, we are speaking off the record.

And finally when Hillel, a disciple of R. Akiva, is approached by a would-be convert and challenged to teach him the entire Torah "while he stands on one leg," Hillel responds by rephrasing R. Akiva's Golden

Rule in more practical terms by teaching you what not to do: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. This is the entire Torah; all the rest is commentary; go out and study it…" (B.T. Shabbat 31a) And similarly, the same sage Hillel teaches, "Do not judge your friend until you actually stand in his place" (Mishna Avot 2:5), which is another way of saying that you must not judge your brother unless you had been faced by the same trial he had to face – and had responded differently.

You must love your friend by seeing him and judging him as though you were truly standing in his place.

Perhaps when R. Akiva initially judged R. Yohanan ben Zakkai's "deal" with Vespasian, he (R. Akiva) was not in the midst of a brutal and losing battle against Rome; at that earlier time it was comparatively easy for him to criticize ben Zakkai as having given up too much too soon. However, once he himself became involved in what eventually was the tragic debacle of Bar Kokhba against Rome, he very well might have taken back his critical attribution of Isaiah's verse to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, who was certainly vindicated by subsequent Jewish history.

Yes, we must love our friends as we love ourselves, and one of the ways to fulfill this command is by refraining from judging our "friends" until we actually stand in their place. *© 2016 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The demands that the Torah imposes upon us with the large array of commandments that appear in this week's Torah reading are major and taxing. Nevertheless we have a rule that the Torah never demands the impossible from human beings or of human behavior. As such, I feel that the true challenge implicit in the commandment to be a holy and dedicated person – the idea that is present in the opening words of this week's Torah reading – is the fact that the path that leads us to this holy and dedicated state of being are mundane in their nature.

We would understand and perhaps even appreciate if the commandments were of an extraordinary measure of self-denial, asceticism or enforced isolation from human society. That is the picture that many of us have of a holy person, someone alone atop a mountain involved in a permanent state of meditation and purification.

We are not accustomed to think of holy people as being the people that we come in contact with on a daily basis in our life experience. We assigned the role of holiness and dedication to G-d to great Torah scholars and other spiritual leaders. We do not think of the storekeeper, the bus driver or any of our service personnel as being obligated to be especially holy.

But even a cursory review of this week's Torah reading will show us that the nature of most of the commandments described concern themselves with everyday life and with regular and ordinary events. Holiness is viewed as not being an exalted state of being out of the reach of the average Jew but rather as a natural and necessary by-product of living a life of Torah observance.

There is a legend concerning the great Maggid of Dubno, Rabbi Yaakov Kranz and his relationship to Rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna. Rabbi Elijah invited the famed Maggid to visit him and to point out to him how he could improve himself in the service of his Creator. Rabbi Elijah, who spent nearly every moment of his waking hours in the study of Torah, seemed to have little room for improvement in his spiritual life.

However, the Maggid said to his host as follows: "You sit here in your study, surrounded by your books, immersed in Torah knowledge and therefore you are the great Gaon of Vilna. But, why don't you go out and stand with the fishmonger in the marketplace of Vilna, in the real world of human interaction, of buying and selling, of temptation and honesty, and let us then see if you would truly be the Gaon of Vilna."

The legend then tells us that the great Rabbi Elijah wept when he heard this challenge of the Maggid. Holiness was to be found not only in the study room but it had to exist in the fish market as well. We are all bidden to be holy and to sanctify all aspects of our behavior and life and be worthy, at all times, of serving G-d in the proper manner. *© 2016 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

Why does the Torah conclude the mandate to honor the elderly with the words "I am the Lord (ani Hashem)?" (Leviticus 19:32) What is the connection between the elderly and recognizing G-d?

Often it is the case that the elderly suffer from simple neglect. In other words, one could pay little attention to the elderly, claiming to be unaware of their needs. In the words of Rashi "I might think that one can close his eyes as though he did not see him [the elderly]?" Therefore, the Torah states "I am the Lord." G-d is everywhere, and sees everything, and G-d also knows the motives within the heart of every human being. He knows who is deceiving the elderly, making believe not to see them.

Another possibility: The term, "the Lord (Hashem)" is really a compound of the verbs "was," "is," and "will be." G-d is, after all, above time. As such, He is all at once past, present and future.

This concept teaches an important lesson

concerning treatment of the elderly. In contemporary society, the elderly are, by and large, cut off. This happens because, as individuals become older, less is expected of them. In turn, the elderly begin to expect less of themselves and perceive themselves as being less important. The consequence is a policy of isolation in which the elderly are kept out of sight in their homes, institutions or retirement centers.

Judaism sees it differently. The elderly, through their wisdom, experience, maturity and creativity have much to contribute to the larger world. Writing about older years, Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel says, "old age [should] not be regarded as the age of stagnation, but as the age of opportunities for inner growth...They are indeed formative years, rich in possibilities to unlearn the follies of a lifetime, to see through inbred self deceptions, to deepen understanding and compassion, to widen the horizon of honesty, to refine the sense of fairness."

Whereas most of society promotes a philosophy of pushing the elderly out, Judaism believes in the philosophy of absolute inclusion and embrace, an approach of complete interaction of the old with the young. Hence, the Torah concludes this mandate with "I am the Lord." As G-d is of all ages, so too should all ages interface and so too can all ages make significant contributions to society.

Rabbi Benjamin Blech offers one other insight which explains the addendum "I am the Lord." He argues that G-d is telling us that since He is the oldest in the universe, He is particularly concerned about those who share this divine quality of age and He is concerned about how they are treated.

I have always believed the maxim that the test of a community is the way it treats its most vulnerable members-a category that surely includes the elderly. If the vulnerable are mistreated, the victims are not the only ones being harmed. The victimizers lose, too, and so does the community. G-d is hurt as well, because by disrespecting the elderly, we show disrespect to G-d. *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.*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Laws of the Nation

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The title of the subsection that appears in the Encyclopedia Talmudit volume nine, entitled “the laws of the nation” (*Hilchot Midinah*) is misleading. It’s not referring to laws that apply to the governance of the land nor to those laws which the populace must follow as a result of returning to our independent and sovereign land of Israel, but rather things that are permissible or prohibited not in the context of Jewish law.

We have three examples of this and not all follow Jewish law:

1. The Mitzva of *Orlah* (not eating from the fruits of the tree for the first four years) is associated with the land of Israel. However this law is also adhered to in the Diaspora. The *Ammoraim* (those Rabbis who lived approximately from the third century until the seventh century) stated that this law as it applies to the Diaspora was dictated from Moshe at Mount Sinai (*Halacha L’moshe M’sinai*), but there are those who say that it is the law of the nation. In other words the nation in the Diaspora assumed upon themselves this obligation.

2. Jewish law allows the worker in certain situations to eat while he is working. However, when dealing with the law of the land there are additional situations where the worker may eat during work. These have become the law of the land. As a result, the traditions of the land have become Torah law. In essence the tradition has superseded the law.

3. The third example is the selling of land using a document as a bill of sale. To this the Talmud in tractate Kedushin 9a states that “this is the law”. Some say that the meaning of “this is the law” stated in tractate Kedushin, is referring to the law of the land-in other words tradition.

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Color Me Needed

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

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

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

In the case of the flesh-cutting for the dead, we are looking here at something similar to the tearing of a garment as a sign of mourning, which not only is not

objectionable, but is a commanded part of our mourning procedure. Our clothes are physically the closest things to our own bodies. When we lose a dear relative, we acknowledge that our personal world has sustained a breach. Its material has been torn. Its wholeness has been disturbed; where it all came together, there is now a jagged edge and a gap filled with emptiness.

Such a statement of loss is both poetic and appropriate. The Torah teaches, however, that it becomes excessive when we apply it to our bodies, to our very selves. Placing that cut on our persons conveys the idea that it is not just our personal worlds that have become darkened and insufficient, but our very lives. Wearing that cut upon ourselves expresses the thought that the passing of someone dear to us leaves us forever lacking and incomplete.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Both of the prohibitions we have considered-cutting the flesh and tattooing-are similar. Each begins with a rejection of the mistaken notions of paganism, but ultimately go well beyond that. They lead to

recognition of the proper relationship we maintain with HKBH, far away from the debased subservience to dark forces that remains part of contemporary life, centuries after the old gods disappeared from Western consciousness. (Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Vayikra 19:28)

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

There are two mitzvos in Parshas Kedoshim that together encompass the entirety of our avodas Hashem. The first is "kedoshim tihiyu -- You should be holy", which is interpreted differently by Rashi and Ramban. Rashi explains this passuk to refer specifically to prohibited relationships. The Rambam expands its scope and includes it in Sefer Kedusha of Mishna Torah in the halachos of kashrus as well. According to these rishonim, it is the scrupulous observance of these intricate laws that makes up a life of kedusha.

Ramban interprets kedoshim tihiyu as referring to one's lifestyle, and understands it to proscribe all physical indulgences that, although not specifically prohibited, do not fit in to a lifestyle of kedusha. Thus, according to Ramban, even if all the detailed laws of Sefer Kedusha are observed, a gluttonous, hedonistic lifestyle is a violation of kedoshim tihiyu, since being kadosh demands a lifestyle of kedusha.

Both interpretations of kedoshim tihiyu focus on our relationship with Hashem. The second expansive mitzva of Parshas Kedoshim is "V'ahavta l'reacha kamocha -- You should love your fellow man as you love yourself", which includes all aspects of bein adam la'chaveiro. The Baal Halachos Gedolos counts different examples of chessed, such as bikur cholim, nichum aveilim, etc. as separate mitzvos. In Rambam's count of the mitzvos, however, he includes all mitzvos of chessed in one mitzvah, i.e. subsumed under the mitzva of "V'ahavta l'reacha kamocha". According to Rambam, why don't distinct types of chessed count as separate mitzvos?

There are two dimensions to the mitzvos bein adam la'chaveiro. The Chafetz Chaim comments on the passuk in the navi Micha that Hashem requires us to, "asos mishpat v'a'havas chessed -- act justly and love kindness." Why is it that with respect to justice we are told to act, while regarding kindness we are told to love kindness as well? The Chafetz Chaim explains that justice can be served through action alone. Kindness, however, can't be fully implemented if one remains an unkind person internally; in order to act truly kindly, we must become individuals who love performing acts of kindness. If the Torah would have commanded us concerning specific acts of chessed, we may have misunderstood that kind acts alone suffice. Therefore this mitzva is formulated using the word "love" because we must become loving people.

Feeling love is essential, but it is not enough. There is an additional source which obligates us in each of the numerous specific acts of chessed: the Torah delineates the different acts of kindness Hashem performs, and we are required to emulate Hashem. Just as He visits the sick, comforts the bereaved, and rejoices with the chosson and kallah, so too must we follow suit. The Torah illustrates how Hashem is involved in the specifics to teach us that just having a good heart and vague feelings of love are not sufficient, rather these emotions must result in concrete actions to our fellow man.

These two principles upon which the entire Torah rests, kedusha and ahava, have both broad and narrow applications. We must perfect our actions as well as our perspective on how we relate to the physical world that surrounds us. Similarly, we must excel in our practical acts of kindness while simultaneously becoming loving sensitive individuals. As we read the myriad mitzvos, both bein adam la'makom and bein adam la'chaveiro found in Parshas Kedoshim, let us focus on the dual goals of both facets of Torah observance.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"Love your friend as yourself, I am G-d" (Vayikra 19:18). Immediately following this (19:19), we are commanded to keep all the "chukim," the laws that, at least at first glance, do not seem rational. (The specific "chok" mentioned is "kilayim," forbidden mixtures, such as crossbreeding animals or vegetation, and wearing garments made of both wool and linen.) Why did the Torah place a completely understandable commandment—treating others as you would want to be treated by them (the "golden rule," the epitome of laws between people that we would have realized should be observed even if they weren't commanded) next to "chukim," (laws between man and G-d, specifically those we would not have considered observing had G-d not commanded them)?

The Talmud (Shabbos 31a) relates the story of a non-Jew who approached Hillel asking to be converted, provided he could be taught the entire Torah "while standing on one foot." Hillel converted him, and told him, "what you dislike, do not do to your friend—that is the entire Torah, the rest is only a subset of it—go study it." While we can understand how this "klal" (general rule) of treating others well can include all the laws that pertain to dealing with people (mitzvos bein adam la'chaveiro), how can it also include laws that are between man and G-d? How does treating everyone else as well as I want to be treated by them have any relevance to keeping kosher (or any other "mitzvah bein adam la'Makom")?

Rav Elchonon Wasserman z"l (Kovaitz He'aros, Explanations of Aggados 1) asks how the Rambam can

include believing in G-d as one of the 613 commandments (positive commandment #1). After all, if one already believes, there is no need for the commandment, and if one does not (yet) believe, there is no impetus to follow any commandment! Either one believes or does not; how can belief be dictated?

Rav Elchonon answers that it is obvious to anyone who is intellectually honest that there must be a Creator. Just as the mere existence of a watch indicates that there must be a watchmaker, that a building must have a builder, and that a painting must have been made by an artist, creation, with all of its intricacies, must have a Creator. The cause for denying the existence of the Creator, despite His being easily perceptible, is the desire to not be obligated to follow His rules (or to acknowledge a Superior being). This bias can blind an individual to what should be obvious. It is for this reason, he explains, that our sages (Sifre and B'rachos 12b) understand the verse "do not follow your hearts" (Bamidbar 15:39) as referring to heresy. It is not the brain that causes one to not believe, but the heart. The commandment to believe, is, in essence, a commandment to be intellectually honest—to remove any and all biases that might prevent realizing that, just as the existence of software is evidence of a programmer, the world we live in testifies that there is a Creator.

[I have been told that Rav Zelig Epstein, z"l, disagreed with Rav Elchonon, and was of the opinion that rather than it being obvious that there is a Creator, with our biases clouding our ability to acknowledge Him, we are hard-wired to believe in a Creator. Nevertheless, it would still be our biases that short-circuited the belief we would have otherwise had. Therefore, the mitzvah to believe could still be described as a mitzvah to remove our biases. I will add that we can only work on our own biases, we cannot judge others and what biases they may have. This is especially true when we take into account Rav Dessler's "N'kudas Ha'bchirah," see http://tinyurl.com/hff52dw.]

That this commandment is phrased as "believing in G-d" rather than "being objective," as well the fact that in order for there to be an impetus to fulfill this (or any) mitzvah, there must be a pre-existing belief in the Being that commanded it, indicates that the point of the mitzvah is that we shouldn't just rely on blind faith, but work on stripping away as many of our biases as we can (and as much of them as we can), and use our more-objective brains to come to the most-likely-to-be-correct conclusions. [According to Rav Zelig's model, the mitzvah would seem to be allowing ourselves to connect with the beliefs we are naturally inclined to have, although this seems even more dangerous than trusting our own judgment. It is more likely that Rav Zelig would have a different approach to answer Rav Elchonon's question, but the issue of getting in touch with our theological starting point still seems more hazardous than trying to be as intellectually honest as we can.] By putting this mitzvah in a context of "belief in G-d," we are being taught that belief is not automatic, but must be worked on, that there will be questions that come up, which we can work through if we approach them with genuine intellectual honesty. (This would apply to all issues of faith, not just the existence of the Creator.)

In order to treat another person as we would want them to treat us, we must be able to put ourselves in that person's shoes. If we are selfish, we won't be able to see beyond our own needs and wants. The ability to understand what the other person would not want, and thereby avoid doing it, can only come about after a certain level of objectivity has been attained. Once we remove the "self" from the equation, and can see things from a purely objective standpoint (i.e. be intellectually honest), not only will we be able to treat others properly, but, since our biases have been stripped away, it will become obvious that there is a Creator. As the verse continues, "love your neighbor as yourself, I am G-d." After attaining objectivity by being able to treat them as you'd want them to treat you, it will become clear that "I am G-d." And once it is clear that G-d created us (and must have a plan for us), His laws, even the "chukim," will be readily followed.

[Although there are many steps between realizing that there must be a Creator and realizing that He gave us the Torah and expects us to follow its commandments (even its "chukim"), if we can successfully remove our biases, including accepting that we won't necessarily be able to fully understand everything (certainly not right away), and that we have to reexamine concepts we were taught when we were younger -- this time through a more mature perspective, anything we are expected to "believe" must also be within reach of being "realized" through intellectual honesty.]

This not only explains what Hillel said to the convert, but it also explains Rabbi Akivah's statement that "loving your friend as yourself" is an "overarching principle of the Torah" (Sifra and Y'rushalmi N'darim 9:4; see Targum Yonasan and Midrash Lekach Tov, who explicitly equate the two), as objectivity is a character trait that encompasses the entire Torah. Since one must be objective in order to take heed not to do anything to others that they don't want done to them, this is precisely what Hillel told the potential convert, and what Rabbi Akivah reiterated. Be objective enough to treat others as you would have others treat you; everything else in the Torah is a subset of being intellectually honest.