

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON KEDOSHIM - 5765

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From: [sefira@torah.org] Subject: [Sefira/Omer] Day 13 / 1 week and 6 days Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 6, will be day 13, which is 1 week and 6 days of the omer. Sefira, Copyright © 2005 by Torah.org...



From: halacha-owner@yutorah.org on behalf of Beit Midrash [BeitMidrash@yu.edu]

To: halacha Weekly Halacha Overview
BY RABBI JOSH FLUG
THE MITZVAH OF SEFIRAT HA'OMER

The Torah (Vayikra 23:15) states that there is a mitzvah to count (the days and weeks) for a period of seven weeks in conjunction with the offering of the korban ha'omer. This counting is known as sefirat ha'omer. The Gemara, Menachot 66a, states that there is a mitzvah to count the days as well as the weeks. The Gemara then adds that Ameimar only counted days and not weeks for he held that counting nowadays is only done as a remembrance for the times when the korban ha'omer was offered. As Rashi explains, since nowadays there is no korban ha'omer, there is no biblical requirement to count. Therefore, Ameimar felt that it was sufficient to count the days and not the weeks as a remembrance of the times of the mikdash. Rambam, Hilchot Temidin UMusafin 7:24, writes that the mitzvah of sefirat ha'omer applies in all times, implying that even today there is a biblical obligation to count the days of the omer.

The Opinion of Bahag

Tosafot, Menachot 66a s.v. Zecher, cite Ba'al Halachot Gedolot (Bahag) who is of the opinion that if one skips a day of counting, he may no longer continue counting. This is based on the verse temimot (complete) used by the Torah to describe the counting process. Apparently Bahag is of the opinion that if one day is missed, the counting is incomplete. Tosafot disagree with the opinion of Bahag as does Rabbeinu Yitzchak (cited in Rosh, Pesachim 10:41). [See R. Ovadia Yosef, Yabia Omer, Orach Chaim 3:28, who quotes many other Rishonim who disagree with the opinion of Bahag.]

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 489:8, rules that if one skips an entire day of counting, one should continue counting without reciting a beracha. The reason one continues counting is because according to most Rishonim, there still exists an obligation to count, even if one day is skipped. However, one does not count with a beracha to show deference to the opinion of Bahag that one who skips a day is no longer obligated in the mitzvah of sefirat ha'omer.

One can question whether the Shulchan Aruch's ruling is due to a bona fide concern for the opinion of Bahag, or whether it is a stringency similar to many other stringencies that we find in the area of Hilchot

Berachot. R. Shlomo Z. Braun She'arim Metzuyanim B'Halacha 120:4, posits that Shulchan Aruch's ruling is only an added stringency. The reason why he rules this way is because one who skips a day still has the option to fulfill the mitzvah in its entirety by hearing the beracha from someone else, and then counting himself. R. Braun suggests that nowadays, people who skip a day assume that they are no longer obligated in the mitzvah and do not count altogether. Therefore, the losses of following this stringency outweigh the gains, and one should count with a beracha regardless of whether or not a day is skipped.

Despite, R. Braun's suggestion, Mishna Berurah 489:37, as well as contemporary Poskim (see R. Ovadia Yosef, Yabia Omer, Orach Chaim 3:28) assume that if one skips an entire day of counting, one can no longer recite a beracha on sefirat ha'omer. However, it should be noted that according to most Rishonim there still exists an absolute obligation to count every night, and the inability to recite a beracha should by no means deter one from fulfilling this mitzvah. [See also Teshuvot Beit HaLevi 1:39, who suggests that since there is a mitzvah to count weeks as well as days, if one skips a day of counting in the middle of a week, he may count with a beracha at the end of every week, as counting weeks constitutes a separate mitzvah. This suggestion was not adopted by Mishna Berurah.]

Rabbi Soloveitchik's Explanation

Rabbeinu Yitzchak, op. cit., implies that the reason behind Bahag's opinion is that he viewed the counting of all forty nine days as one elongated mitzvah. Therefore, if one skips one day of counting, the mitzvah is no longer complete and one can no longer fulfill the mitzvah.

R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik [cited in Eretz HaTzvi 3:6,7 and Mesorah 3 (5750) 35-38] suggests a different explanation to Bahag's opinion. The reason why one who skips a day of counting may not continue counting with a beracha is because sefirat ha'omer requires consecutiveness. One who has skipped a day of counting cannot consider himself as part of the count, as his count lacks consecutiveness, and he therefore can no longer fulfill the mitzvah of sefirat ha'omer.

R. Soloveitchik adds that based on this explanation one can understand an otherwise puzzling ruling of Bahag. Bahag, cited in Tosafot, op. cit, rules that if one neglects to count the omer at nighttime, one may count during the daytime, and continue counting the next night with a beracha.

The implication is that one cannot fulfill the mitzvah by counting during the day. If so, why may one count the following night. Shouldn't a daytime count be considered as if one did not count at all?

R. Soloveitchik explains, by counting during the daytime one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of sefirat ha'omer. However, one who counts during the daytime can nevertheless consider that counting as consecutive to the previous day. Therefore, one can continue counting that night as the consecutiveness remains intact, despite his non-fulfillment of the mitzvah the previous day.

Based on his explanation of Bahag's opinion, R. Soloveitchik resolves one of the more famous questions regarding sefirat ha'omer. Minchat Chinuch no. 306, queries regarding a minor who counts every night and then becomes a bar-mitzvah. May he continue to count with a beracha, or perhaps since his counting as a minor was not obligatory, it is as if he skipped those days, and he may not count with a beracha according to Bahag. R. Soloveitchik suggests that since the opinion of Bahag is not contingent on fulfillment of the mitzvah, but rather on consecutiveness, it should not matter that the minor is not obligated in the mitzvah. As he counted in actuality, his consecutiveness remains intact, and he may continue to count with a beracha as a bar-mitzvah.

R. Soloveitchik's explanation provides a resolution with regards to an onen (one who has lost an immediate relative that has not yet been buried). An onen is not only exempt from performing mitzvot, but he is prohibited from performing mitzvot in order that to focus his attention on the burial of his relative. The question arises regarding an onen who

will be exempt from mitzvot for one entire day during the period of sefirat ha'omer. Ostensibly, since he may not perform mitzvot, he may not count the omer and therefore, may not continue counting with a beracha even after the burial. This view is espoused by Nahar Shalom as cited by Mishna Berurah, Bi'ur Halacha 489:8 s.v. B'lo. R. Yechezkel Landau, Teshuvot Noda B'Yehudah, Orach Chaim 1:27, addresses this issue, and posits that with regard to the prohibition of the onen to perform mitzvot, one may rely on the opinion of R. Shlomo Luria, Teshuvot Maharshal no. 70 that an onen may perform certain mitzvot. Therefore, he may count as an onen without reciting a beracha. After the burial, he may continue counting with a beracha.

However, R. Landau notes that R. Luria's opinion is not universally accepted. Therefore, although there is room to permit relying on the opinion of R. Luria to count the omer as an onen, nevertheless, according to those who dissent, there is no fulfillment of the mitzvah altogether. One can then question whether counting as an onen will justify counting with a beracha after the burial. Nevertheless, according to R. Soloveitchik's opinion, even if there is no fulfillment of the mitzvah, one would be entitled to count the subsequent nights with a beracha as the onen's count would certainly satisfy the requirement for consecutiveness. Furthermore, one does not need to rely on the opinion of R. Luria, in order to continue counting with a beracha subsequent to the burial. One can simply count for non-mitzvah purposes, and this too will maintain the consecutiveness of the count.

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From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND Sent: Thursday, May 05, 2005 11:09 PM
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"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas

Kedoshim

The Command To 'Be Holy' Was Given In A Mass Gathering
Parshas Kedoshim begins with the words "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel (kol adas bnei Yisrael) and say to them: 'Kedoshim Tihiyu - You shall be holy...'" [Vayikra 19:1-2]. Rashi points out that the uncommon inclusion of the phrase "the entire assembly of the Children of Israel" in the standard formula "Speak to the Children of Israel..." teaches us that this mitzvah was specifically given in the presence of the entire assembly of Israel (b'hakhel).

There is a famous disagreement among the early commentaries as to exactly what is meant by the mitzvah "You shall be holy." Rashi interprets the mitzvah as one of abstinence -- "You shall be removed from arayos [forbidden sexual union] and from sin." The word "Kadosh" literally means: "separate." When we say "Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh" about Hashem, we are emphasizing his separateness and uniqueness. Thus, the meaning of "You shall be Kedoshim" is "You shall be separated - from forbidden sins."

The Ramban, in a famous argument with Rashi, says that "You shall be Kedoshim" has nothing to do with illicit sexual acts. Rather, Kedoshim Tihiyu [You shall be holy] is referring to perfectly permissible activities. The concept is "sanctify yourself by withdrawing from that which is permissible to you" (kadesh es atzmecha b'mutar lach). Without such self-limitation, the Ramban declares, a person can be a 'naval b'rshus haTorah' [a glutton 'sanctioned' by the Torah]. The level of sanctity required by this pasuk [verse] is that achieved by restraining oneself somewhat from even those physical pleasures that the Torah permits.

The Chasam Sofer points out that whether we accept Rashi's interpretation or the Ramban's approach, the message of this mitzvah is one of abstinence. One could perhaps erroneously come to the

conclusion that the only way to achieve this level of sanctity would be to lock oneself on the top of a mountain in a monastery. One could think that one should ideally have nothing to do with people; one should not get married and have nothing to do with the opposite gender at all. The Torah therefore makes clear that the "holiness" of a monk is not desirable. This section was specifically delivered "b'hakhel". Everyone was present - the men, the women, and the children.

One must be a Kadosh [a holy person], but one must be a Kadosh in the context of the congregation and the community. One must get married and one must raise children. One must play with his kids and spend time with his family and be a part of the community. The Torah wants the holiness of complete human beings.

The Kotzker Rebbe used to stress "MEN of holiness you shall be to Me" [Shmos 22:30]. "G-d is not looking for more angels." The Torah was not given to angels [Brachos 25b]. It was given to human beings who have wants and desires and are social animals. In that context we are commanded to develop holiness.

Therefore, specifically Kedoshim Tihiyu, of all mitzvos, was relayed in a mass public gathering to emphasize that despite our obligation to achieve holiness through a certain degree of abstinence it must be in the context of the community, together with one's wife, one's children, and one's neighbors.

The Torah Is Trying To Address Our Human Inclinations

The Torah commands "A man shall fear (i.e. - revere) his mother and father..." [Vayikra 19:3]. Rashi notes that regarding fear of parents, the mother precedes the father. However, in the Ten Commandments, where the mitzvah is honoring one's parents, the father precedes the mother. Rashi explains: "It is revealed before Him that son fears his father more than he fears his mother; therefore, the pasuk needed to emphasize fearing the mother. On the other hand, regarding honor the situation is reversed. The natural tendency is to feel a closer sense of love and attachment to a mother and consequently to honor her more than a father. In both cases the Torah found it necessary to stress that which is against a human being's natural inclination.

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz points out that there lies a much greater lesson in this famous teaching. The message here is that a person must reflect and ask himself: "What is my nature really about?" Because human nature is such that we fear our fathers more than our mothers, that is precisely why we must work on fearing our mothers at least as much as our fathers. Since human nature is to honor one's mother more than one's father, that is precisely why we need to work on honoring our father ahead of our mother.

The message of this teaching of Chazal is to be alert for our natural tendencies. We need to introspect, to consider how the human psyche works, and to be on guard and compensate for any natural tendencies that might compromise our Torah obligations. If we will blindly follow our natural instincts, we will miss the message of the Torah.

The Torah relates to human beings with their predilections and with their character traits and desires, and zeroes in on their weaknesses, attempting to correct them. The message is not merely regarding fear and honor due one's parents. The message encompasses the entire scope of Torah law. The message is to think. Where am I going? What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? How does Torah address them?

Baal HaTurim Comments on Juxtaposition of Mitzvos

The Torah commands "You shall not cheat your fellow and you shall not rob; payment for the work of a hired worker shall not stay overnight with you until morning" [Vayikra 19:13]. The very next pasuk then teaches: "You shall not curse a deaf person..." [Vayikra 19:14].

The Baal HaTurim offers an interesting comment on the juxtaposition of the law against withholding salary and the law against cursing a person who cannot hear. The Baal HaTurim says: "Even if your

employer withholds your salary, don't curse him. Rather bring a claim against him in court."

What do we do if our boss withholds our paycheck? What do we do if we are not paid on time? The Baal HaTurim advises what we should do under such circumstances: We should sue!

There is an old principle: "Don't get mad, get what is rightly due to you." The thing that should NOT be done is to get angry at him, to curse him, to throw darts at his picture. Such behavior is non-productive. It does not hurt the boss one iota to be cursed or to have darts thrown at his picture. It only hurts the employee who allows himself to be consumed by anger as a result of this occurrence. The employee will come home, kick his dog, yell at his children, and spend sleepless nights churning in aggravation.

In the meantime, the boss is sitting on his yacht drinking beer. As far as the employee's curses are concerned, the boss is "deaf": He does not hear them. The boss is cruising. The employee is stewing. This, the Baal HaTurim advises, is a totally non-productive situation for the employee. Let him not curse. Instead, let him bring his valid claim to Beis Din.

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From: torahweb@torahweb.org Sent: May 04, 2005
Subject: Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Parshas Kedoshim - An Awesome Experience
to subscribe, email weekly@torahweb.org for anything else, email: <http://www.torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>
RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY
PARSHAS KEDOSHIM - AN AWESOME

EXPERIENCE

The theme of morah (awe) appears throughout parshas Kedoshim. The parsha begins with the mitzvah of morah for parents. Later in the parsha we are commanded to treat the beis hamikdosh with the proper awe and respect. Following this mitzvah, we are taught how to properly respect Torah scholars; Chazal understood that we must also have morah for them (Pesachim 22b). We are told twice in parsha Kedoshim of our obligation of yiras Hashem. In addition, we are also instructed to act with awe and reverence towards a king (Kiddushin 32b based on Devarim 17:15).

What is the common denominator between talmedei chachamim, parents, kings, and the beis hamikdosh that requires us to relate to them with the same sense of awe with which we relate to Hashem?

During ma'amad Har Sinai, Moshe tells Bnei Yisroel why kabbolas haTorah had to happen in the manner that it did. Although the Torah could have been given without the awe-inspiring event of thunder, lightning and shofar blasts, yiras Hashem had to be instilled in Bnei Yisroel through their witnessing the presence of Hashem. Only the yiras Hashem attained through the Har Sinai experience could serve as a deterrent to cheit (Shemos 20:17).

The Har Sinai experience with the critical component of yiras Hashem had to be preserved for eternity. Therefore, the Torah set up several ways to ensure that this lesson of yiras Hashem would never be forgotten. One of the primary roles of parents is to transmit to their children the Har Sinai experience as they received it from their parents. That is, besides the obligation to teach the actual laws of the Torah to

their children, parents are required to teach the lesson of yiras Hashem that Har Sinai instilled in their ancestors. The Torah explicitly states that this transmission will enable subsequent generations to attain the yiras Hashem that was reached at Har Sinai (Bamidbar 4:10).

The transmission of the Har Sinai experience is accomplished not only by parents but also by teachers. In earlier generations it was customary to study Torah standing to emphasize the awe and respect of its study, reminiscent of ma'amad Har Sinai. Although in later years this became too difficult, the reverence and awe must still be retained (Brachos 22a). The transmission of Torah from teacher to student took place not only on an individual level, but on a national level as well. This occurred once every seven years when the king read the Torah at the communal gathering of hakheil. This event, which involved the entire Jewish people listening to the Torah, was reminiscent of ma'amad Har Sinai and helped keep that awesome event alive in the collective memory of the Jewish people. The only appropriate location for hakheil was the beis hamikdosh. The Ramban in the beginning of parshas Teruma elaborates on the role of the beis hamikdosh as being the eternal continuation of Har Sinai. The focal point of the beis hamikdosh was the kodesh hakodoshim which housed the luchos, thus serving as the constant reminder of the events of ma'amad Har Sinai.

The Torah employs these four ways of perpetuating the awe-inspiring event of mattan Torah. Remembering and reliving that experience should fill us with awe and trepidation so that we can begin to approach our reliving of Har Sinai in the proper frame of mind.

As we proceed from Pesach, when we first experienced "vayiru ha'am es Hashem" at krias Yam Suf, to Shavuos when we celebrate Mattan Torah which was given amidst thunder and lightning, let us focus on instilling in ourselves and our children the eternal message of yiras Hashem.

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com]
Sent: May 05, 2005

PENINIM ON THE TORAH
BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM
Parshas Kedoshim

You shall be holy. (19:2) What is the meaning of these words? In the Talmud Avodah Zarah 20b, Chazal define kedushah, holiness, as the apex of the spiritual plateau one can attain. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said, "Torah leads to carefulness; carefulness leads to alacrity; alacrity leads to cleanliness; cleanliness leads to separation; separation leads to purity; purity leads to saintliness; saintliness leads to humbleness; humbleness leads to fear of sin; fear of sin leads to holiness; holiness leads to Divine Spirit." The Rambam explains that Divine Spirit is simply a higher level of kedushah. Now that we have an idea of what it takes to achieve kedushah, we understand that this plateau is not readily accessible. Furthermore, the previous parshah ends with an admonition forbidding the abominations practiced by the pagans. While one who refrains from carrying out the pagan atrocities does not necessarily become qualified as an ethical person, the Torah immediately juxtaposes the pasuk of Kedoshim tiheyu, as if the two are closely related. Ostensibly, a great gulf exists between restraint from pagan atrocities and achieving holiness. We have just heard that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair starts the spiritual ascent to holiness with carefulness, which means that we must be vigilant and meticulous in observing all of Hashem's mitzvos. One would think that between the admonition not to perform atrocities and the enjoinder to attain holiness, there should have been many other mitzvos! How are we to understand this?

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, explains that the meaning of Kedoshim tiheyu is more than an enjoinder for the Jew to be holy. It postulates that a Jew can never fully attain kedushah. He can only aspire to achieve holiness. If one does not want to fall prey to the moral abyss of

depravity, however, he must infuse himself with a constant striving to reach the unattainable summit called kedushah. Regardless of how high one has climbed on the ladder of holiness, he has not achieved his full potential.

In the Talmud Niddah 30b, Chazal relate that before a child is born, his neshamah, soul, takes two oaths. It first accepts upon itself to perform all the mitzvos, and then it pledges to consider itself b'bechinas rasha, as being evil, even if others consider it a tzaddik, righteous person. The Baal HaTanya questions this second pledge, since it seems to contradict a statement made in the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 2:18 that one should never view himself as evil. He explains that there are two conceptualizations of rasha and tzaddik. The Talmud does not mean that one should view himself as actually being a rasha. Rather, the intention is that one should see himself as not yet having fulfilled his potential. He should always aspire to achieve yet greater distinction.

Kedoshim tiheyu means just that: Always aspire to greater heights in kedushah. Do not settle for what you have become, but, rather, strive higher, want more, achieve greater kedushah. The word "always" means to be consistent, constant and relentless in continuing to achieve this goal. Just as laws governing nature assert that nature cannot tolerate a vacuum, so it is also with regard to the spiritual dimension: one cannot live in a vacuum. Yosef Hatzaddik was thrown into a pit, which the Torah describes as being empty, devoid of water. Chazal add that while there may not have been any water in the pit, there were snakes and scorpions in it. How did Chazal know this? Rav Aharon explains that nature abhors a vacuum. The human spirit must be filled with something. If it is not filled with water, the water of Torah, then it is filled with spiritual snakes and scorpions. The environment in which we live plays an enormous role in influencing our lives. Thus, only one who is constantly seeking kedushah, continually aspiring to reach a more elevated plateau of holiness, can rise above his environmental influence. The Torah does not justify the means by which one reaches the end goal, because the goal of a Jew is to realize that there is no end, no upper limit, no summit. Being a Jew requires endless climbing. The means is the end! Therefore, all of our actions must contain some degree of kedushah, or they fall prey to spiritual defilement. One who does not aspire to Kedoshim tehiyu can fall to the nadir or moral depravity as evidenced by the juxtaposition of these two parshios.

You shall reprove your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him. (19:17)

In the Talmud Sanhedrin 101a, Rabbi Yochanan says, "Why did Yoravam merit to become king? It is because he reproved Shlomo Hamelech. Why then did he eventually lose the monarchy? It is because he reproved him publicly." It is incredible that the mitzvah of tochachah, reproach, is so great that Shlomo Hamelech lost his kingship to Yoravam, who was evil. Yet, because this rebuke was carried out publicly in a manner that the only one who was really embarrassed was the sinner, he lost the kingdom. The same measure that secured the Davidic dynasty for him caused him to lose it, because he did not perform the mitzvah of tochachah properly.

In his commentary to our parshah, Rashi writes that "one should not bear a sin because of him," since by rebuking the sinner publicly he causes his face to discolor as a result of the embarrassment. The Toras Kohanim says that this applies only in the event that the sin in question is one that involves b'ain adam l'chaveiro, the relationship between man and his fellow man. If the sin is one between man and Hashem, the sinner is brought to task in spite of the crowd.

Once the Brisker Rav, zl, publicly rebuked a shochet, ritual slaughterer, for acting inappropriately with regard to the laws of shechitah. The man insolently ignored the rav's rebuke and continued in his indiscretion. On Erev Yom Kippur, the Brisker Rav sent for the shochet and proceeded to ask mechilah, forgiveness, from him. The shochet was incredulous, "Why is the rav appeasing me? I am the one who was wrong and I should be the one to ask for mechilah. I did not listen to the rav's tochachah," he said.

"That is exactly why I am apologizing and requesting your forgiveness. Had you heeded me, then the public rebuke would have been justified. Since you ignored me, my rebuke was not successful and, instead, I publicly shamed a Jew for no credible reason."

Since giving proper rebuke can have a compelling effect on an individual, especially children whose self-esteem can be destroyed through improper critique, I would like to relate an episode that occurred concerning Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, as cited by Rabbi Pesach Krohn, which should serve as a paradigm for us.

In the early 1950's, Haifa was the only city in Eretz Yisrael where public buses operated on Shabbos. Ostensibly, this public display of chillul Shabbos, desecration of Shabbos, had a ripple effect on the Shabbos observance of the general public. It was because of this that the frum, observant, community would convene annually for an evening of lectures and words of inspiration about the significance and holiness of Shabbos. That year the seminar took place immediately after Israeli Independence Day. As part of the Yom HaAtzmaut celebration, there had been a parade in which members of the air force, navy, paratroopers and infantry were represented. Leading the parade was the mayor of Haifa, sitting in an open car, surrounded by a number of female army personnel, who waved and smiled to the crowd.

One can understand that this blatant disregard for the laws of tznius, modesty, was a breach in the moral traditions as transmitted through the generations. The principal speaker for shemiras Shabbos seminar was to be Rav Sholom Schwadron. When the famed Maggid of Yerushalayim heard about this public chillul Hashem, he became incensed. He considered this to be distasteful and an open affront to authentic Torah-oriented Judaism. Thus, when Rav Sholom ascended to the lectern to speak about Shabbos, he instead spoke sharply against the citizens of Haifa for allowing this indecency, and he chastised the Israeli army for what he felt was impropriety. It was only after he concluded his diatribe that he reverted to his original topic of shemiras Shabbos.

Regrettably, his listeners were not as sensitive to moral decency and tznius as he was. They were disturbed and angry. They had come to hear about Shabbos and instead had become the "victims" of a scourge against morality, the army, and their mayor. They felt that Rav Sholom had no right to change topics. They had come with good intentions to receive chizuk, strengthen their resolve and be inspired towards the sanctity of Shabbos, and instead they had been victimized. In the end, the topic of Shabbos had been diminished.

This retinue continued all Shabbos as Rav Sholom spoke in other shuls. His primary message was tznius, with Shabbos taking a distant second place. At every place he spoke, the response paralleled the first: anger.

The city council's reaction was much more intense. They decided to ban Rav Sholom from speaking publicly in Haifa for an entire year. Hearing this, Rav Sholom, an unusually sensitive person, was very disturbed. He felt that he had done no wrong. How could he have ignored such blatant disregard for the Torah? On the other hand, he did offend and alienate specifically those people that he had come to inspire. He sought the counsel of the primary Torah leader of the time, the Brisker Rav.

After presenting the facts to the Rav, he waited eagerly for a reply. Did he act appropriately - or not? The Brisker Rav listened attentively and replied the following, "Did you ever wonder why the Bircas HaTorah, which we say daily, ends with the words laasok b'divrei Torah, 'to engage ourselves in the words of Torah'? Why does it not simply say lilmud Torah, 'to study Torah'? Is this not the essence of the mitzvah?"

"The answer," the Rav said, "is that eisak also means business. For one to succeed in Torah, he must relate to it as a business - with a sense of purpose, with definite goals and objectives. He must work diligently to achieve these goals.

"You went to Haifa for a specific purpose - shemiras Shabbos. However, you became sidetracked from your original goal and instead spoke about something entirely different. Had you gone to Haifa to raise money for your business, you certainly would not have spoken out against the parade. You would have had other objectives. Because you diverted your attention, you neither succeeded in your objective of inspiring the people about Shabbos observance, nor did you accomplish anything in the area of tznius."

Afterwards, Rav Sholom added, "The Brisker Rav made me realize that it was the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, that motivated my speech about tznius. It was its way of preventing me from speaking about shemiras Shabbos. How careful and introspective we must be with regard to our motives."

You shall reprove your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him. (19:17)

Simply put, one who rebukes his fellow in an inappropriate manner is guilty of a sin. Just because the individual is guilty of an indiscretion, it does not permit him to be embarrassed by some do-gooder. There is a correct method and manner on how to offer words of reproach. In an alternative reading of the pasuk, Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, gleans a different message. He reads the pasuk: "You shall reprove your fellow, and you will not burden him with sin." This means that one should not wait until his friend has sunk to the nadir of sin before he decides to reprove him.

He should reprove him while he is still righteous and performs all of the mitzvos, so that his friend's commitment to mitzvos will be strengthened. Do not wait until your friend sins! Speak to him from a positive perspective: encourage his good deeds; urge on his devotion; rally his faith in the Almighty. In this way, you will prevent him from having to carry the burden of sin. Furthermore, if we see our fellow beginning to slip, we should immediately step in, lest he fall. It is much easier to catch someone before he falls than to lift him up from the ground.

Love your fellow as (you love) yourself. (19:18)

The enjoinder to love our fellow Jew as we love ourselves entails many facets of our interrelationships with others. Sensitivity toward another Jew's feelings demands that we go out of our way to see to it that we do not offend or slight another Jew, even inadvertently. Certainly, this applies with regard to blatant disregard of another person's feelings. Our Torah leaders went to great lengths to ensure that their actions were always in tune with the feelings of other people. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, in his inimitable manner, cites a number of instances where this idea is manifest.

It happened that a couple who had spent a number of harmonious years together were struck with tragedy when the wife developed a chemical imbalance in her mind. Overnight, life with her became impossible. On the other hand, because of her emotional state, she was not halachically capable of accepting a get, bill of divorce. The husband presented his problem to his rav and asked for advice about how to proceed. He could not go on this way. The batei din in both Yerushalayim and Tel Aviv had agreed to a heter meah rabbanim, in which one hundred qualified rabbis would annul his marriage, circumventing the need for a get. The rav said that he must first consult with the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, the Chazon Ish, zl, before he would render a final judgment. The Chazon Ish's reply demonstrated his character. According to the medical information presented to him concerning the woman's condition, it was indicated that there was a possibility for her to be cured of her condition. "Imagine," said the Chazon Ish, "that this woman would be walking down the street when she would suddenly meet her husband strolling with another woman. The shock of this confrontation could drive her permanently insane. This is a life and death situation to which I reply in the negative. I suggest that rather than seek a get, you should pray for the woman to be cured of her illness!"

In a similar circumstance, Horav David Bliacher, zl, heard that, on the encouragement of their rav, a couple who had been married for over ten years and had yet to be blessed with children, was getting divorced. Rav David went out of his way to contact the husband and convince him not to go forward with the divorce. Instead, he suggested that he entreat Hashem with great intensity to be blessed with a child. In addition, Rav David gave his personal blessing that the couple be blessed with a child.

One year later, when the couple had the zchus, merit, to celebrate the Bris of their son, the father proffered the honor of sandek, holding the baby, to Rav David. The venerable Rosh Hayeshivah refused, instead advocating giving this privilege to the father's rav, because he did not want the man to lose faith in his rav.

When Horav Yechezkel Sarne, zl, the Rosh Hayeshivah of Chevron, reached an advanced age, it became increasingly difficult for him to attend the tefillos in the yeshivah. Nonetheless, on Motzoei Shabbos, he would gather all his kochos, strength, and make every attempt to daven Maariv with the yeshivah. When he was asked about this practice, he replied, "True, Tefillas Maariv is the most lenient of all the tefillos, but how could I pass up the opportunity to say, 'A gutte voch!' to wish my students a good week? This is the mitzvas aseih, positive commandment, of 'Love your fellow as (you love) yourself.'"

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From: Beit Midrash
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To: RGoldwicht@yutorah.org

WEEKLY SICHA FROM RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT
MOURNING THE TALMIDIM OF R' AKIVA

During this period, between Pesach and Shavuot, we mourn the deaths of the talmidim of R' Akiva. The gemara in Yevamot (62b) tells us that R' Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students, all of whom died during the period between Pesach and Shavuot because they didn't treat each other with respect. With their deaths, the world of Torah was left desolate, until R'

Akiva came to R' Meir, R' Yehudah, R' Yosei, R' Shimon, and R' Elazar ben Shamua, the rabbis of southern Israel. It was these students who upheld the study of Torah after the deaths of R' Akiva's earlier talmidim.

The words of this gemara require explanation. First of all, why does the gemara say that R' Akiva had "12,000 pairs of students," chavrutot, instead of saying 24,000 students, which sounds much more impressive and would seemingly drive the point home much better? Secondly, the Maharal in Netiv HaTorah (chap. 12) says that the reason why this tragedy befell R' Akiva's students is that they didn't treat each other with respect during this period between Pesach and Shavuot. The implication is that if this had happened at any other time of the year they might have been spared. What is so special about the period between Pesach and Shavuot that made their transgression so egregious?

To answer these questions, and to see how they apply to us as well, we must explain as follows: The days between Pesach and Shavuot are days of counting as we approach Kabbalat HaTorah, assigning a number to each day. Numbers have two functions. When a person counts, he is able to take inventory, realizing what he lacks and organizing what he actually has. Also, numbers represent an object's value; when a person goes into a store, he can tell by the numbers written next to each item which items are more valuable, as they are priced higher. During these days of counting up towards Kabbalat HaTorah, as we assign numbers to each day, HaKadosh Baruch Hu is asking us to do two things: 1) to organize everything that happened since yetziat Mitzrayim, which begins immediately after yetziat Mitzrayim and is the reason the first night of Pesach is called "leil haSeder, the night of Order"; 2) to show that Torah is the thing we value most.

What gives Torah its value is that it becomes a part of the person who learns it, to the extent that the gemara in Makkot (22b) criticizes those who stand for a sefer Torah but not for a talmid chacham – they don't realize that the greatness of a gadol is that he is a walking sefer Torah, as the Torah influences his every action and is revealed through his conduct. This is also the meaning of the gemara in Avodah Zarah (18a), which says that R' Chanina ben Teradyon would teach Torah to the masses while holding a sefer Torah to his chest. How can you teach while holding a sefer Torah? Not only is it uncomfortable, but it may even be a lack of kavod to the sefer Torah! Rather, this very point is R' Chanina's lesson – the sefer Torah is a model for how a person must elevate himself, a blueprint for how one should comport himself, and the type of person one must become.

R' Akiva's students were blessed with tremendous minds, able to bring the highest levels of honor to the Torah. They knew how to explain not only the words of the Torah, but the crowns on the letters as well. They were able to explain why one letter has a crown while another letter doesn't and the lesson behind it. Their potential was incredible. But their lack of proper respect towards each other during the period between Pesach and Shavuot, a time of maximal revelation of Torah, warranted severe punishment, as it demonstrated that they had not absorbed Torah as a model of what a person must become.

How is it possible that R' Akiva, the foundation of the Oral Torah, could be unaware that his entire beit midrash was full of students disrespectful of each other? The answer to this question lies in the words of the gemara with which we opened. R' Akiva did not have 24,000 talmidim, but 12,000 chavrutot of talmidim – meaning that on the outside everything looked rosy; R' Akiva's talmidim were learning together, analyzing sugyot together. But deep inside they did not respect each other. R' Akiva was unaware of this attitude because he could not know their innermost thoughts; only the Creator can know that.

It is R' Akiva who teaches us that the klal gadol of Torah is "v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho," that the love you feel towards others should be the same as the love you feel towards yourself. It is R' Akiva who teaches us that "chaviv adam shenivra b'tzelem," that we should love every person because every person was created b'tzelem Elokim. It is R' Akiva who

teaches us that "sheli v'shelachem shelah hu," appreciation and respect for the sacrifices others make for us.

In Pirkei Avot (2:9), Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai instructs his students to go out and seek the best way for a person to grow. R' Eliezer says the key is having an "ayin tovah, a good outlook"; R' Yehoshua says the key is "chaver tov, a good friend"; R' Yosei says "shachen tov, a good neighbor"; R' Shimon says "haroeh et hanolad, having foresight"; and R' Elazar ben Arach says "lev tov, a good heart." Their great rebbe, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, explains to them that R' Elazar ben Arach is correct; the key to life is lev tov, since lev tov includes all of the others. How amazing is it then that the days of sefirah are split into two sections – the 32 days before lag b'omer and the 17 days after lag b'omer, which is the gematria of "lev tov."

Our task during these days is to make ourselves truly aware that the key to success in life, the key to kevod shamayim and the key to truth is lev tov. The more we work on ourselves to make our lev truly tov, the better everything else will become as well, for lev tov incorporates everything. This is also the reason why the greatest communal aveilut that Klal Yisrael observes is not for the Churban, which lasts for only three weeks (between 17 Tamuz and 9 Av), but the 32 days of mourning for the talmidim of R' Akiva, in order to inspire us and awaken us to the notion that the key to success in avodat Hashem and in increasing kevod shamayim is lev tov.

Shabbat Shalom!

Meir Goldwicht

The Weekly Sichah on the Parsha and Moadim by Rabbi Meir Goldwicht is a service of YUTorah, the online source of the Torah of Yeshiva University. Get more parsha shiurim and thousands of other shiurim, by visiting www.yutorah.org. To unsubscribe from this list, please email mailsrv@yutorah.org with "unsubscribe rgoldwicht" in the message

From: ZeitlinShelley@aol.com Sent: April 29, 2005

**THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF RABBI AKIVA'S DISCIPLES – PART 1
BY RABBI MOSHE MEIR WEISS**

Now that we are in the midst of the days of sefira, we are very much involved in practicing what it says is the Shulchan Aruch. One should not shave, one should not listen to music, and one should not get married from the second day of Pesach until Lag B'Omer. In fact, this time of year is one of only two instances in the Jewish calendar when we observe a national mourning for an extended period of time. The other time of year is, of course, during the Three Weeks, from the seventeenth day of Tamuz until that infamous day, the Ninth of Av.

We can readily understand why we mourn during those Three Weeks which climax with the terrible day of Tisha B'Av. Those days commemorate a great tragedy – the destruction of the two Holy Temples. We know that bracha and prosperity emanated from the Shulchan (the Holy Table in the Mikdash), just as we know kapara, atonement, emanated from the Beis HaMikdash itself. And, of course, the Temple was the place where Hashem would reside in our midst. With the destruction of the Temples, we lost all of that. We lost the close presence of the Shechina. That was truly a loss of national significance. Therefore, we can certainly see why so much emphasis is put on mourning for the loss of the two Temples.

However, the mourning during sefira which we are observing now needs more study. Why are we mourning? The Shulchan Aruch tells us it is because of the terrible disaster that befell the disciples of Rabbi Akiva who had twenty-four thousand talmidim. They all died between Pesach and Lag B'Omer from a horrible and painful death known as askara, which can be translated as either croup or diphtheria. Since they all died during this time, we keep a long period of national mourning.

Indeed, this was a terrible disaster but, unfortunately, it was not the worst our people have seen. There were much greater disasters. In our recent history, the holocaust looms. Before this, there were uncountable pogroms and massacres – where many more than twenty four thousand people died. And for those events, we did not even set aside one day of mourning – let alone thirty. Therefore, we have to understand why Chazal chose this particular incident in our history for commemoration in all generations. We have to analyze what makes this tragedy so unique.

In his day, Rabbi Akiva was the Gadol HaDor, the greatest sage of that generation.

He raised twenty-four thousand talmidei chochomim, exceptional students. The Gemora informs us that they spread out all over – from the city of Givas to the city of Antifras. These cities were the pillars of Torah in that era. These talmidim were the people who everyone looked up to as the pillars of society as role models for their children, and as those who upheld Yiddishkeit. Then, disaster fell and plucked away the disciples of Rabbi Akiva – they alone – and no others. Those great men of stature all died; every single one of them. Not only did they all die, but they all died the same horrible death – one that the Gemora in Brachos [8a] tells us is the worst of over nine hundred different types of death that Hashem created in this world. Moreover, they all died during the same period of time; from Pesach until Atzeres, from Pesach until Shavuot. So we are beginning to see that this event was clearly unique, one that screams out for interpretation.

The Gemora in Yevamos [62b] states that this tragedy left the world desolate of Torah, Ha'olam shomein. That would be comparable to saying that if, G-d forbid, a disaster would strike and all the Yeshivas we have today would be destroyed, we would have no Torah left. This was the situation in the time of Rabbi Akiva. Hashem destroyed almost every talmid chochom. People then were asking themselves, "Zu Torah v'zu sechorah – This is Torah and this is her reward!?" Fortunately, in those days we still had sages who were great enough to pinpoint the cause and explain to us why such a calamity occurred. And, once explained to us, as it was to them, we learn a very great lesson. And that lesson is what we must to review again and again, every year during sefira.

The Gemora in Yevamos tells us that the reason the talmidim of Rabbi Akiva died was, "Shelo nahagu kavod zeh l'zeh – They did not practice honor one with another." Note that the Gemora does not say they disgraced one another, or that they embarrassed each other. The Gemora simply states that they did not honor each other. They did not do anything negative – yet neither was there any positive action.

Now, we may ask ourselves, Is this such a terrible sin that its penalty is deserving of being death? Especially when we remind ourselves that these were talmidei chochomim, we wonder, Wasn't their Torah enough to protect them? And if they did deserve death, we may further question, Was their transgression so terrible that they deserved to die so horribly of diphtheria?

The Maharsha offers an explanation. The Gemora in Shabbos states, "Siman l'loshon hora: askara – A sign of loshon hora is askara." If a person dies of diphtheria, it is probable that person was guilty of speaking loshon hora. So, the Maharsha conjectures, perhaps the talmidim spoke loshon hora about each other and in this way, they did not honor one another. However, this is a little hard to grasp. First of all, is it presumable, is it even possible, that Rabbi Akiva did not rebuke them for this sin? Surely he would have tried to correct their ways. Couldn't Rabbi Akiva stop them in time, or at least in time enough to save at least some of his talmidim? And, is it possible that all twenty-four thousand talmidei chochomim were not makpid, were not careful in loshon hora? Weren't there some talmidim who did not commit the terrible sin of loshon hora?

And, if we accept the fact that this indeed was their sin, is it conceivable that everyone else was careful not to speak loshon hora except them? After all, we have to remember that only these talmidei chochomim died. No layman suffered, no 'am ha'aretz' died. The disease should have affected more than just twenty-four thousand people, especially those other people who didn't have the merit of learning Torah supporting them.

We can question further, why didn't any of those twenty-four thousand talmidim do teshuvah? Why didn't they take it to heart once they saw their friends dying? After all, the Gemora says, "Meis echad min hachaburah, yidagu kol hachaburah – If one of the group dies, the whole group should worry." The individuals in the group must search their own deeds and correct what is askew. If it was such a blatant sin as loshon hora, how come the rest of the talmidim did not realize this and correct themselves before it was too late? With all these questions, it is hard to imagine that their sin was indeed loshon hora.

What, then was it? What did the twenty four-thousand disciples of Rabbi Akiva do that was so wrong? These students all had the same teacher, the same Rebbe. They all learned the same lessons, heard the same lectures, had the same notes. So each one felt there was no reason to honor his peer. After all, what did one talmid have that his colleague didn't? His friend had Torah, but he had the same Torah, the same notes, the same teacher. So, why honor him? Why should he honor any of the other talmidim? This was their sin. "Shelo nahagu kavod zeh l'zeh – They did not practice honor one with another." They all had the same reasoning. Why should one honor the other when all have the same thing?

However, this is a very crucial mistake in the concept of kavod HaTorah, honoring the Torah. When we honor a talmid chochom, we are not honoring the man

himself. We are honoring the Torah that is contained within him. A person that has Torah contains a chelek, a part of Hashem.

We can learn this concept from the posuk, "Ozvei Hashem yichlu – Those who forsake Hashem will be destroyed." The Gemora in Brachos [8a] interprets the posuk. "Who forsakes Hashem? Zeh hamaniach Sefer Torah v'yatza – This is someone who walks out of Shul during the reading of the Torah." This person is called an 'ozav Hashem.' We see from this that the Gemora equates the Torah with Hashem, for one who walks out during leining is considered as if he is walking out on Hashem. Hashem and Torah are one. Now we can go on to understand the posuk, "U'vo sid'bikun – And you should cleave to Him." In the merit of the honor we give to Hashem, His Torah, and His Torah scholars, may we be blessed with long life good health and much Torah success.

From: ZeitlinShelley@aol.com Sent: April 29, 2005
THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF RABBI AKIVA'S DISCIPLES – PART 2
BY RABBI MOSHE MEIR WEISS

How is it possible for a mortal human being to cling to Hashem? The Rambam answers that by cleaving to talmidei chochomim, you are fulfilling this posuk. Why is that? Because a talmid chochom has Torah in him. He is a living Torah scroll because, as we explained, Hashem and Torah are the same. Therefore, when you cling to a talmid chochom, you are indeed clinging to Hashem.

The Gemora tells us of Shimon Chamsoni. Shimon Chamsoni would explain all the word 'es' (the often non-translated word spelled simply aleph-tes) wherever they occur the Torah. He would expound on the specific meaning of this mysterious word, explaining what it added to the meaning of the sentence, every time it appeared in the Torah. Then, he came to the posuk, Es Hashem Elokecha tira – You should fear your G-d." What could that 'es' possibly come to tell us? What could it possibly include? What could be put on the same par as fear of Hashem? As a result of being confounded by this posuk, Reb Shimon wanted to discard all his work and to conclude that all the 'eses' in the Torah do not come to teach us anything. Until, that is, along came Rabbi Akiva and explained, "Es Hashem Elokecha tira: L'rabos talmid chochom – The 'es' is coming to include a talmid chochom." You must fear a talmid chochom like you fear Hashem.

How could Rabbi Akiva equate fear of a talmid chochom with fear of G-d? Because, as we've explained, the Torah of the talmid chochom is a chelek of Hashem. When you show fear of a talmid chochom, you aren't fearing the man. You are fearing the Torah he has within him. And this was the mistake the students of Rabbi Akiva made. They felt that each one had exactly the same as the next, so why should they honor one another?

Now, if the point was to honor the person, they could have had a valid argument. However, it's not the person that has to be respected, but the knowledge of Torah that he possesses. So even though they all had the same amount of learning and the same amount of Torah in them, each and every one of them, nevertheless, contained a chelek of Hashem. And, therefore, they should have honored one another. This was indeed such a grievous mistake that they deserved to die a horrible death.

Again, we can see our concept in the posuk, "Mipnei seiva tokum, v'hadarta p'nei zakein, v'yareisa m'Elokecha – Stand up for an elderly person, and stand up for a zakein, and fear your G-d." Isn't a zakein an old person? Isn't the posuk being more than a bit redundant? However, when the Gemora defines zakein, it says, "Zeh sh'konoh chochma – One who has acquired wisdom." In other words, regarding a talmid chochom, it isn't a matter of age, young or old.

Why should we stand for a talmid chochom? Because, the posuk continues, you should fear your G-d. When you stand up for a talmid chochom, you are illustrating your fear of Hashem. A talmid chochom has Torah, and Torah is a part of Hashem. So when you stand up for a talmid chochom, and when you show you fear him, you are showing that you fear the Torah that is within him, and you are showing your fear of Hashem.

Koheles [perek ches, posuk yud-gimel], says "V'tov lo yehiyeh l'rasha. Lo ya-arich yamin asher einenu yarei mipnei Elokim – It will not be good for the wicked man. He won't have a length of days, because he does not have the fear of G-d in him." What exactly is Shlomo HaMelech referring to when he says that the rasha will not live long because he does not fear Hashem?

The Gemora in Kiddushin states (by principle of substitution) that the rasha will not live long because he does not stand up for a talmid chochom. Because, in the posuk of 'V'hadarta p'nei zakein,' as in this posuk, the idea of fearing Hashem is mentioned. So now, we can read the posuk again and translate it in another way. "It will not be good for the wicked man. He will not have a length of days, because he does not stand up for talmid chochom." He does not show them the proper respect.

So here it is clearly spelled out for us. A posuk with the wisdom of Shlomo HaMelech foretold the fate of the disciples of Rabbi Akiva. Because they did not honor one another, because they did not stand up for each other, they did not live long lives. They all died young.

We can all learn a very important lesson from this incident. When it comes to honoring a person, a kollel man or even a talmid chochom has to show proper respect for someone who learns Torah. It makes no difference if that person didn't learn as many mesechtas or if that person learns 'only' Chumash. We are not honoring the person's prowess in learning. Rather, we are honoring the fact that the person is learning and, as a consequence, he contains a part of Hashem.

The Derech Chaim, the Sanzer Rav, Zt"l, would always honor people who knew far less in Torah than he. Rav Moshe Feinstein, Zt"l, would even partially stand up for people who were much younger and certainly not as great as he in Torah. These two tzadikim did not look at the person's accomplishments. They respected people for the Torah that they knew, no matter that it was so much less than what they themselves knew, for they understood that that person contained a chelek of Hashem.

In Masechtas Megilah [27b], the Gemora tells us Rebbe Elazar Ben Shamua enjoyed an extremely long life. When his students asked him why he merited such a long life span, he replied, "Mi'yamei lo pasati al roshei am kodesh – In all my days, I never walked over the heads of people that belong to a holy nation." What does this mean?

In those days, the talmidim would sit on the floor around the Rebbe. Rabbi Elazar had a great many talmidim and, if he would come late, he would have to step over his students in order to get to his place in the front. Rabbi Elazar always made sure to be there early, before his students arrived, so that he would not have to subject them to that.

So here we see how a Rebbe went out of his way not to dishonor his talmidim. Rabbi Elazar respected his students, not for what they knew, for he was their teacher and thus, knew much more than they. He honored them because they learned Hashem's Torah. They were living Sifrei Torah, each containing a piece of Hashem.

That is the reason Rabbi Elazar merited such along life. He was mechaved (one who honors) the Torah. We can see from here that, not only will one who does not respect the Torah not live long, but the reverse is also true.

Indeed, this was the derech of Rabbi Elazar's life. In Pirkei Avos [perek daled, Mishna yud-gimmel], it says that Rabbi Elazar used to say: Yehi kavod talmidcha chaviv alecha k'shelach – Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own honor. Here he is espousing the principle that you should honor your talmid. Why? Because of the Torah he is learning.

We know now that if we don't show the proper respect, it is deadly. The talmidim of Rabbi Akiva reasoned logically that there was no need for one to honor the other.

One has just as much as the other. However, they should have realized that they had to honor the Torah inside the person, the chelek of Hashem that is contained within him.

This is why, during this time of year, we observe a national mourning to engrave this lesson upon our hearts and minds. During these days of sefira, these days of hachana (preparation) for Kabalas HaTorah, preparation for receiving the Torah anew, we have to ask ourselves: Do we practice this very important concept? Do we give honor to all those who learn Torah? Or do we honor only those who are outstanding in Torah? And of course, if we do find fault with ourselves in this aspect, now is the time to correct it, during these days of mourning.

The Rambam in Hilchos Talmud Torah [perek vav, halacha yud-alef], states, "Kol hamevazeh talmid chochom, ein lo chelek Olom HaBah - One who embarrasses a talmid chochom does not have a share in the World to Come." That's a pretty final punishment: To lose forever. To lose eternity.

But now we can understand why. The person who embarrasses a talmid chochom is not only embarrassing the flesh and blood, he is embarrassing a part of Hashem. And that deserves the most severe punishment. We have to realize that Hashem went to great lengths to teach us this concept. "Yakor b'einei Hashem, ha'mafsa hachasidov – It is very hard on Hashem, the death of his righteous ones." And Hashem had to part with, not only one tzadik, but twenty-four thousand tzadikim. And the world was left devoid of Torah.

But Hashem did this in order to impart to us this very crucial lesson. Let us take it to heart and pass this all important message on to our children. And in the merit of the honor we give to Hashem, our Kavod HaTorah and His Torah scholars, may we be blessed with may we be blessed with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

(Sheldon Zeitlin transcribes Rabbi Weiss' articles. If you wish to receive Rabbi Weiss' articles by email, please send a note to ZeitlinShelley@aol.com.)

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: May 05, 2005 To: yhe-intparsha@etzion.org.il Subject: INTPARSHA65 -30: Parashat Kedoshim yeshivat har etzion israel koschitzky virtual beit midrash (vbm) introduction to parashat hashavua http://vbm-torah.org/archive/intparsha65/30-65kedoshim.htm

Parashat Kedoshim

"KEDOSHIM TIHIYU" – "YOU SHALL BE HOLY"

BY RAV MICHAEL HATTIN

INTRODUCTION

"G-d spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the entire congregation of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I G-d your Lord am holy..."

With the reading of Parashat Kedoshim, the shift in focus of Sefer Vayikra continues to unfold. While the first five parashiyot of the book relate primarily to the world of the Mishkan and to the Kohanim who minister within it, the final five parashiyot address the larger world of the people of Israel. Thus, the first half of the book addresses the sacrificial service (Vayikra, Tzav), the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan (Shemini), the abstruse and Temple-related topics of Tum'a and Tahara (Tazria, Metzora), and the awesome service of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Acharei Mot).

The second half of the work, in contrast, considers the prohibition of sacrifice outside of the precincts of the Mishkan, forbidden sexual relationships (Acharei Mot), various laws of social, moral or ritual character (Kedoshim), the holiday cycle (Emor), the Sabbatical cycle and related agricultural laws (Behar), and finally the blessing and the curse that seal the covenant as well as the book (Bechukotai). While the division is certainly not hermetic, it is nevertheless quite pronounced, so that the recurring introductory phrase of the first half is often "Speak to Aharon and to his sons," while of the second it is almost invariably "Speak to the people of Israel."

With this shift in focus, from priests to people and from the Mishkan to the masses, comes as well a marked increase in the number of mitzvot. While the parashiyot of Vayikra, Tzav, and Shemini average about seventeen mitzvot each, Kedoshim and Emor each contain about three times as much! And while most of the other parashiyot of the book confine their discussion to relatively circumscribed topics, be they the matter of the sacrifices, the dedication of the Mishkan, the affliction of tzara'at and its remedy, the laws of tum'a and tahara, the holiday rituals or the laws of the sabbatical year, there is no other Parasha in Sefer Vayikra whose scope is as broad as that of Parashat Kedoshim. In its opening verses, for example, it succinctly speaks of the injunction to be holy, of reverence for parents, of Shabbat observance, of the prohibition of idolatry, of sacrifices, of harvest laws and of concern for the poor and the convert! And this multifaceted presentation of mitzvot continues throughout most of the Parasha.

THE PARASHA OF KEDOSHIM AND THE ASSEMBLY OF ALL OF ISRAEL

It should not surprise us, then, that Rashi quotes an early tradition to the effect that "the Parasha of Kedoshim was publicly read at the Hakhel ceremony, because a majority of the Torah's main laws are contained within it" (commentary to 19:1). This Hakhel (literally "gather" in the imperative) ceremony, celebrated once every seven years, consisted of an assembly of all of the people of Israel at the Temple in Jerusalem, and was characterized in the main by a public reading of essential sections of the Torah. The purpose of the event, as spelled out in Devarim 31:10-13, was to emphasize the dynamic and living nature of the tradition and to ensure its transmission to the succeeding generation, so that Israel might enjoy permanence in its new land:

"Moshe recorded this teaching and he presented it to the Kohanim the descendants of Levi who bore the Ark of G-d's covenant, as well as to all of the elders of Israel. Moshe commanded them saying: "at the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of release ("Shemitta"), at the festival of Sukkot, when all of Israel arrives to appear before the presence of G-d your Lord at the place that He will choose, then you shall read this instruction before all of the people of Israel so that they will listen. Assemble the nation – men, women, children and the converts that dwell within your gates – in order that they might hear and in order that they might learn, to revere G-d your Lord, and to be careful to perform all of the words of this Torah. Thus their children who do not yet know will hear and learn to revere G-d your Lord, all of the days that you dwell upon the land that you pass over the Yarden in order to possess."

Precisely because there is such a vast and varied number of mitzvot in the Parasha, it may seem difficult at first glance to detect a larger linking theme. And although we may organize the laws of Kedoshim according to the conventional division of those that pertain to our relationship with G-d ("bein adam la-Makom") and those that pertain to our relationship with other people ("bein adam le-chaveiro"),

this may not assist us in isolating the fundamental principle. While many of the medieval commentaries sought the source of the Parasha's overarching rule in its opening words of "Kedoshim tihiyu" or "You shall be holy, because I, G-d your Lord, am holy," they nevertheless disagreed about the specific import of the idea.

RASHI'S DEFINITION OF HOLINESS

Let us begin with Rashi who quotes a much earlier Rabbinic tradition:

"You shall be holy" means that you shall separate yourselves from forbidden sexual relationships and from transgression, for wherever there is a boundary concerning sexuality there is holiness...(commentary to 19:2).

For Rashi, the primary meaning of holiness – "kedusha" in the original Hebrew – is separation. To be holy means to be separate and to achieve holiness is to embrace separation. G-d is the ultimate expression of kedusha because He is utterly transcendent, His existence entirely separate from the limitations of the material world. But, avers Rashi, there is a specific area of human life that requires special attention in the matter of kedusha and that is sexuality. Presumably because the sex drive can be so easily misdirected, therefore it must be especially guarded from misuse. The textual inspiration for Rashi and the Rabbis must surely have been the conclusion of last week's Parasha of Acharei Mot that detailed no fewer than twenty-four sexual relationships and practices of the Egyptians and Canaanites that were to be regarded as forbidden, and then concluded the entire matter with a most sobering summation:

"Do not become defiled by all of these things, for through these practices the peoples that I drive out from before you were themselves defiled. The land became defiled and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land spewed out its inhabitants. But you must keep My statutes and My laws, and do not do all of these abominations, whether the citizen or the convert that dwells in your midst...let not the land spew you forth for defiling it, just as it spewed out the peoples that came before you. Rather, keep My observances and do not perform all of these abominable statutes that were practiced before you, and do not become defiled by them, for I am G-d your Lord (18:25-30)."

EXPANDING RASHI'S APPLICATION

Though Rashi singles out forbidden sexual relationships, it is clear from his comments that he has as well a broader application in mind: "'You shall be holy' means that you shall separate yourselves from forbidden sexual relationships and FROM TRANSGRESSION..." Presumably, Rashi understands that all that follows in the Parasha, the myriad and various mitzvot, draw on the source of holiness or separation for their inspiration. "Kedoshim tihiyu," therefore, is not only the introductory formula of the Parasha but also its prime directive. After all, can there ever be an act of true morality, justice or sanctification that does not call upon us to exercise self-limitation/separation in order to protect the interests of the other, be that other our fellow man or G-d?

Holiness, then, though it may be used in a narrow sense, also must have for Rashi a comprehensive meaning that is all-encompassing. After all, any direct parallels between Rashi's human holiness consisting of eschewing forbidden sexual relationships and G-d's counterpoint of "for I G-d your Lord am holy" is meaningless. But if holiness is the sweeping state of separation from all that is immoral, unjust or defiling, then G-d's absolute transcendence may be reasonably cited as its paradigm.

THE RAMBAN AND HOLINESS AS A STATE OF BEING

While appreciating Rashi's implication, it is however the Ramban (13th century, Spain) who develops the idea of holiness into an all-enveloping state of being. For Rashi, holiness means sexual propriety and attentiveness to all of the mitzvot, but for Ramban holiness only begins where the prescribed performance of the mitzvot is concluded. In his unforgettable comments, the Ramban famously describes the so-called "naval bereshut ha-Torah" or vile fellow who lives within the parameters of the Torah's laws:

"...the matter is that the Torah proscribed certain sexual practices and forbade certain foods, but it permitted relations with one's wife and the consumption of meat and wine. Now the glutton may therefore find license to be lecherous with his wife or his many wives, inebriated with wine and gorged with meat. He might speak profanity without compunction since the Torah records no such prohibition, and in the process he would be considered a vile and dissolute person that is nevertheless acting within the boundaries of the Torah!

Therefore this verse (of "Kedoshim tihiyu") is mentioned after the Torah has detailed all of the activities that are to be curtailed entirely, for it presents us with a general and comprehensive command that we are to be separated from overindulgence..."

What the Ramban decries is unfortunately a most common feature of our religious and spiritual landscape. It is eminently possible, says the Ramban, to

be living a "Halakhic life" while overlooking the objective of sanctification entirely. A person may keep the Torah's laws, and even be punctilious in their performance, but still able to find much room for behavior that is excessive and hedonistic. Since the Torah, for example, proscribes certain animals for consumption but nowhere proscribes over-consumption of that which is permitted, a person may be following the laws of the Torah even as they spend excessive effort, time and money on filling their belly to bursting. And what about vulgar or senseless conversation, talk of inanities that even the staunchest evader of "lashon hara" may engage in? In short, there is potentially a gaping chasm between the letter of the law and its spirit, between what the Torah demands and what it expects, and between performance of the mitzvot and the intent of holiness.

For the Ramban, then, "Kedoshim tihiyu" is presented in the wake of the very same list of forbidden sexual practices that inspired Rashi's comments. But the juxtaposition is not simply an invitation to define holiness as separation but rather to recognize that holiness is an exceedingly lofty goal whose realization can only begin after the Torah's prohibitions have been accepted and observed. Holiness demands of us much more than perfunctory performance of mitzvot even as we seek out within their framework opportunities for excess. Holiness is a comprehensive state that defines not only what we may or may not do but rather who we are and who we must strive to become. To be holy is not only to be taking the Torah's laws seriously but to be seeking a defining connection with G-d, "for I G-d your Lord am holy."

The injunction of "Kedoshim tihiyu" for the Ramban not only serves as the fitting comprehensive and concluding principle to Parashat Acharei Mot's list of banned sexual liaisons, the all-inclusive counterpoint to specific curtailed activities. It must also be, as it was for Rashi, the introduction to what follows in the text, to the various commands that constitute Parashat Kedoshim. Perhaps then holiness is to be understood not only as the Torah's clarion call to the sensitive of heart to strive for more than narrow attention to that which is prohibited but also to actively seek out opportunities for spiritual growth. While the Ramban describes "kedusha" in terms of steering clear of overindulgence, it also is most certainly about separation in the opposite direction, that is to say devotion and dedication to achieving G-dliness in all of our activities. This is clear from the simple fact that while the end of Parashat Acharei Mot confines its discussion to forbidden sexual relationships, Parashat Kedoshim addresses so much more. As even a cursory reading indicates, there is scarcely a human experience or action that is beyond its purview. And all of them are to be ideally inspired with this most noble quality that the Torah refers to as "kedusha."

Shabbat Shalom

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: May 05, 2005 To: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il Subject: SICHOT65 -30: Parashat Kedoshim Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Student Summaries Of Sichot Delivered By The Roshei Yeshiva

Parashat Kedoshim

SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN
FOLLOWING THE WAYS OF THE GENTILES

Adapted by Matan Glidai

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"The customs of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled, you shall not follow, nor shall you follow the customs of the land of Canaan, to which I bring you, nor shall you follow their statutes" (Vayikra 18:3). What is the meaning of the repetition in this verse? What does the phrase, "nor shall you follow their statutes," add to the first part of the command? In the following verse, we read: "You shall perform My judgments and observe My statutes." The term "judgments" (mishpatim) refers to those commandments whose reasons are clear, those which "had they not been uttered [by G-d], they would be worthy of being enacted [by man]" (Rashi, *ibid*). "Statutes" (chukim), on the other hand, are commandments whose reasons are unknown to us - those which, from our point of view, appear arbitrary; there is nothing inherently negative about the prohibited activity itself.

We may explain verse 3 in a similar way. Commenting on this verse, Rashi writes: "This tells us that the customs of the Egyptians and of the Canaanites were the most depraved of all the nations." Hence, the customs of Egypt and Canaan are prohibited because of their inherent perversion, because of the depravity of the acts themselves. Indeed, the chapter does go on to describe acts of immorality which are abominations in and of themselves. But when the Torah speaks of "their statutes," it refers to ordinary actions that are not in themselves negative - just as, from our point of view, there is no moral imperative inherent to such laws as "kil'ayim" (the prohibition of mixing species) or the purification procedure involving the red heifer. Why, then, are these gentile customs forbidden? The Torah does not want us to imitate the gentiles and their culture. We are not commanded, "You shall not perform their statutes," but rather, "You shall not follow their statutes." There is nothing wrong with the actions themselves; the problem is the very imitation of gentile ways and adoption of their culture. Clearly, if the act in question is positive and productive, it should be adopted, but if we are speaking of a mundane act that is performed only because "this is how the gentiles do it," with no inherent benefit, it is forbidden. The Rambam writes (Hilkhot Avodat Kohavim 11:1):

"We do not follow the ways of the idolaters, nor do we imitate them - neither in dress, nor hairstyle, etc., as it is written - 'You shall not walk in the ways of the gentiles,' and we are told, 'nor shall you walk in their statutes.' Rather, a Jew should be distinguished from them and recognized by his dress and by his other actions, just as he is distinguished from them in his thinking and in his character traits...."

The Kesef Mishneh comments here, in the name of the Maharik: "Our teacher [the Rambam] meant here to prohibit only a style of dress that is particular to them, and which is avoided by Jews due to modesty or proper behavior. Since this outfit is worn by [the gentiles] for licentiousness, and Jews avoid it because of their Judaism, then when Jews dress in that way, they appear to acknowledge them and follow them. But if it is not a style of dress that is particular to them, then a Jew is not required by the same logic to distinguish himself from the gentiles at all."

There is no prohibition against performing any action that the gentiles perform; the prohibition involves only appearing like them and performing actions with the aim of being like them. In the Ramban's view, this prohibition applies even to the service of G-d. The Torah teaches, "Guard yourself lest you be ensnared into following them, after they are destroyed before you, and lest you ask after their gods, saying: How did these nations serve their gods? I shall do likewise..." (Devarim 12:30). Rashi explains, quoting the Gemara in Sanhedrin, that the prohibition is performing idolatrous service in the way that it is usually performed. [Idolatry involves two separate prohibitions: a.) performing for a foreign god those actions that were performed in the Temple, even if those actions are not the accepted form of service for that god, and b.) performing actions for a foreign god when these actions represent the accepted service for that god.] Ramban rejects this explanation, maintaining that we are forbidden to serve G-d in the way that the gentiles serve their gods.

His interpretation is based on what we are told in the following verse: "You shall not do so to the Lord your G-d." The Midrash on our parasha (23, 7) teaches: "R. Berakhia taught: The Holy One said to Moshe, 'Go tell Israel: When you were in Egypt, you were like a rose among the thorns. Now that you are entering the land of Canaan, be [once again] like a rose among the thorns and pay attention not to follow the customs of either those [the Egyptians] or these [the Canaanites]....'" When Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt, they made a conscious effort to preserve their uniqueness and not to be assimilated into Egyptian society. As we say in the Haggada: "This teaches that the Israelites were distinguished there." Bnei Yisrael preserved their style of dress, their language, their names, etc. A nation that finds itself in a foreign environment tries not to lose its identity; for this reason, the

danger of Bnei Yisrael starting to imitate the Egyptians was less acute in Egypt. Few of them imitated or adopted the Egyptian culture.

A much greater danger was presented when Bnei Yisrael settled in their own land, under independent sovereignty. They were no longer like a "rose among the thorns;" their conscious effort to preserve their identity and uniqueness grew much weaker. It is for this reason that specifically now, G-d commands the nation not to imitate the culture of the Egyptians or the Canaanites. This problem is particularly acute in our times - the age of the communications revolution. Israel is located in a geographical environment of relatively backward culture, but the media deliver American culture directly into our homes. It is very important that we guard ourselves from imitating the gentiles, that we preserve our spiritual independence. Again, we are permitted to perform actions that the gentiles perform if they are not done for the purpose of imitating them. But we are not to perform these actions solely because "that's how it's done" in other parts of the world. [This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Acharei Mot - Kedoshim 5753 (1993).] yeshivat har etzion israel koschitzky virtual beit midrash alon shevut, gush etzion 90433 e-mail: yhe@etzion.org.il or office@etzion.org.il Copyright (c) 2004 Yeshivat Har Etzion. All rights reserved.

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EMES LIYAAKOV
Weekly Insights from MOREINU
HORAV YAAKOV KAMENETZKY zt"l
[Translated by Ephraim Weiss]
"And if it will be eaten on the third day, it will be considered pigul, and it will not be accepted."
In this week's parsha, we learn about the laws of pigul. When a person brings a korban, he has a set amount of time in which to eat it. If a person offers a korban, while having in mind to eat it after the established time has elapsed, the korban is invalid, and is called "pigul", meaning "rejected". If a person eats pigul, he is chayav kares. However, these laws only apply if the korban was otherwise offered properly. If there was another problem that invalidated the korban, then the korban is not considered pigul, and one is not chayav kares for eating it. While eating it is still forbidden, it does not bear the same severity as pigul. HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zt"l points out that we can learn a very important hashkafik lesson from the halachos of pigul. When a korban that is pigul is otherwise offered properly, the punishment for eating it is much more severe than for eating a korban that would have been invalid anyway. This is a mashal to the way that the world runs. Something that is on a higher level can be ruined by a problem that would have no noticeable effect on something of lesser importance. For example, if a single soldier makes a mistake during a battle, this may affect him and the few soldiers around him. On the other hand, if a general makes a tactical error, that can effect the outcome of the entire war. The greater the responsibility, the greater effect a mistake will have. This concept is represented by pigul, which carries much harsher repercussions than another error in the bringing of a korban. For the same reason, we, as members of Klal Yisroel, the nation for whose sake the world was created, have an added responsibility to ensure that our actions are befitting a nation of our stature. The responsibility that we have to the world demands that our actions always be above reproach. Rav Yaakov uses this idea to explain a somewhat ambiguous phrase found in the vidui that we say during selichos. We confess that, "We are guiltier than any other nation." Is this really true? Can it be that Klal Yisroel is truly worse than any other nation? Based on what we have

explained above, we can now understand this phrase not to mean that our actions have been worse than the wickedest nations in the world, but rather that our actions have had the most impact on the world, and as such, we must carry a greater portion of the blame.

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>
Covenant & Conversation
Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from
RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth
[from 2 years ago]
KEDOSHIM OF LOVE AND HATE
AT 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 G-d, 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 G-d. (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:
[6] 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 G-d . . ."
[7] 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 [unrelated to the previous one, "Do not hate your brother in your heart"], 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 [in the phrase] "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 [so that you will have no cause to hate him] 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 G-d." "All Israel," said the sages, "are sureties for one another." [4] 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 Eybeschuetz (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.