



Are God's mitzvahs **SIMPLE ACTS?**

Or, does intent play a vital role?

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Weekly Parsha

Kedoshim

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Loving Our Neighbors

You shall not take revenge and not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Hashem. (VaYikra 19:18)

(continued on next page)

Weekly Parsha

KEDOSHIM on Cheating OTHERS

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

Parshas Kedoshim can be described as a journey through a myriad of different commandments and prohibitions, combining together to produce the state of kedusha (sanctity) integral to the identity of Bnai Yisrael. We are introduced (and in some cases re-introduced) to some of the most fundamental mitzvos: ranging from idolatry and Shabbos observance, to honoring parents. The concept of honest business dealings with our fellow Jew is also included in the parsha; of course important, but intuitively not quite up there with idolatry. However, Rashi offers a rationale for this commandment that demonstrates how a person's willingness to take advantage of his fellow Jew in business reveals a serious defect in the Jew and break from Judaism.

(continued on page 4)

Mitzvah

PERFECTION *lies Within*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

"For I did not speak to your forefathers and I did not command them on the day I took them out of Egypt on the matters of sacrifice". (Jeremiah; 7:22)

But we know God did in fact dedicate many Torah words addressing the commands of sacrifice. How do we understand this quote? Radak says the next verse offers the answer:

"For it is rather this matter that I commanded you saying: 'listen to My voice and I will be for you a God and you will be to Me a nation'..."

We also learn: "Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak said, "Better is a sin performed with good intent, than a mitzvah not performed with good intent". (Nazir 23b)

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1. The challenge of loving one's neighbor to the standard proscribed by the Torah

These passages instruct us that we may not take revenge or bear a grudge against another and that we are required to love one another. The pasuk delineates two prohibited forms of behavior: taking revenge and bearing a grudge. What is the difference between these two forms of behavior? Our Sages explain that taking revenge is more direct. It involves acting towards a person in the same hurtful manner that one has been treated by this person. For example: I ask to borrow from a friend his pen and he refuses. The next day this friend needs to borrow a pen from me. I remind the friend of his response to my request the previous day and refuse the pen. This is taking revenge. Bearing a grudge is more passive. In the above example, if I lend the pen but point out to the friend that I am not behaving as he behaved to me, this is bearing a grudge.[1] Bearing a grudge is prohibited because it too is a form of hatred. As the second portion of the passage teaches, we are to love one another.

The pasuk's directive to love one another is remarkable in two respects. First, the passage instructs us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This is a wonderful goal. However, our Sages noted that it does not seem to be a very realistic objective. Certainly, we should try to overcome the pettiness and self-centeredness that often interfere with our empathy, compassion, and love for others. But a directive to love another person to the degree one loves oneself seems to require the impossible.

Second, our Sages did not regard this directive as a mere ethical exhortation – an appeal to act with love towards others. The Sages regarded this directive as an absolute commandment. It is included in the Torah's 613 mitzvot. This compounds the first difficulty. Torah is not only establishing an impossible standard of behavior, it is commanding us to achieve the impossible!

2. Loving one's neighbor focuses on actions not feelings

Various commentaries suggest different

answers to these problems. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra explains that the meaning of the instruction is that we should love those things that benefit our friends as we love those things that benefit ourselves. In other words, the Torah is not suggesting that we actually feel for our friends the same love we feel for ourselves. This would not be realistic. The Torah is establishing a standard of behavior. We must be as scrupulous in caring for the needs of our neighbor as we are in caring for our own needs.[2] This remains a high standard, but it does not contradict human nature.

Although Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the passage is somewhat helpful, it is also somewhat vague. What exactly does the passage require? Does it mean that if I need a new home for myself, I must also provide housing for all homeless individuals?



3. The centrality of the commandment to love one's neighbor

There is a well-known teaching of Hillel that may explain Ibn Ezra's position. Hillel explained that a person should not do to another person that which he would not want done to himself. Hillel went on to explain that the remainder of the Torah is merely an elaboration of this principle.[3]

Hillel's lesson is empirically compelling. Many of society's problems could be solved if this principle were universally adopted. But Hillel's contention that this is

the essence of the Torah and the rest is merely an elaboration seems to be an overstatement. Perhaps, Hillel did not intend for this last part of his teaching to be taken literally; he was not suggesting that it is okay to deny Hashem's existence as long as you are nice to people. But if Hillel did not intend for his statement to be understood literally, what was the message he was attempting to communicate?

Sefer HaChinuch suggests that Hillel noted that so many of the mitzvot of the Torah are designed to regulate relations among people. We are not permitted to steal. We cannot overcharge. We are prohibited from engaging in various deceptive business practices. We must return lost objects. All of the commandments are designed to foster and encourage harmony among the individual members of

(continued on next page)

society. Hillel recognized that all of these laws are amplifications of a single theme. They attempt to create a society in which all members have equal rights to fair and compassionate treatment by one another. All of these laws are designed to prevent one member of the group from taking advantage of another. Hillel explained that we each to treat our friends as we wish to be treated, all of these laws would be superfluous.[4],[5]

Sefer HaChinuch's comments provide an explanation of Ibn Ezra's position. We are not expected to be as solicitous of the needs of others as we are of our own needs. However, we are expected to regard his needs as being as serious and real as our own. Therefore, we need not provide shelter for the homeless before building a home for ourselves. We have every right to care for our own needs first. But we cannot dismiss other's needs as insignificant. When the poor require our assistance, we cannot be dismissive. Certainly, I cannot place my rights before those of another person. I must respect those rights as I would expect my own to be respected.

We can only recognize the full implication of this commandment if we acknowledge that this is not our usual attitude. If we are honest, we will admit that although we do not dismiss our friend's needs, we tend to see them as somewhat less compelling than our own. If we honestly review our interactions with others, we will be able to identify behaviors that place our needs above others. The Torah is commanding us to identify these behaviors and correct them.

In short, according to Sefer HaChinuch, we are required to respect other's rights and needs as we do our own. This attitude fosters harmony within a group or society. In a society in which the attitude is not present, there will be friction and discord.

4. We are all fingers of a single hand

Rav Naftali Tzvi Berlin Zt"l – Netziv – offers an alternative understanding of the objective of this commandment. He begins by quoting a teaching from the Jerusalem Talmud. The Talmud observes that we are forbidden from taking vengeance. The Talmud explains that vengeance is absurd. This is illustrated with an analogy. A person is cutting meat; his hand holding the knife slips and he cuts his other hand. Would the person then take punish the hand that slipped by cutting it as well? The Talmud concludes by explaining that this is the message of our passage. We may not take vengeance because we must love one another. We are all similar to the fingers of a single hand, or limbs of a single body. If we take vengeance



upon another person – even to redress a wrong – we are cutting one of our own limbs. [6], [7]

It seems that Netziv is explaining that the mitzvah to love one another is not merely designed to serve a practical purpose. It is not designed to assure order and harmony in society. It has a higher purpose. It is designed to reorient our perspective upon ourselves. We are commanded to refrain from vengeance and to love one another in order to foster within ourselves a healthy and truthful perspective. We must recognize that we are members of a group and nation. This does not mean the individual is not important, or that a person's sense of individual significance is improper. But our sense of our own individual importance cannot overwhelm our realization and acknowledgement that we are also part of Bnai Yisrael.

In summary: According to Sefer HaChinuch, the mitzvah to love one another is essentially a social contract. It is designed to foster harmony. According to Netziv, the commandment is designed to nurture within each person a healthy and truthful perspective on himself. Each of us must be able to see ourselves as a member of a group and nation. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 19:18.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 19:18.

[3] Mesechet Shabbat 31a.

[4] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 243.

[5] If the principle of loving one's neighbor as oneself finds its expression in the many commandments that regulate our interactions, then the commandment seems to be superfluous! Why is such a commandment required if its practical applications are legislated by other commandments? Apparently, this commandment provides guidance in situations that are not directly included in the specific derivative commandments. In other words, the specific commandments regulating our interactions cannot address every particular circumstance that may arise. Therefore, the Torah expresses the underlying principle – to love one's neighbor as oneself – as a commandment. This general commandment provides us with direction and guidance in instances not specifically addressed by the derivative commandments.

[6] Talmud Yerushalmi, Mesechet Nedarim 9:4.

[7] Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv), Commentary Hamek Davar on Sefer VaYikra 19:18.

In warning us on how to deal in business matters with our fellow Jew, the Torah tell us (Vayikra 19:36):

“Just scales and just weights a just dry measure (ephah) and a just liquid measure (hin) you shall have for yourselves, I am Hashem, your G-d who has taken you out of the land of Egypt.”

The concept here of “just scales” refers to the overall concept of honesty in commerce. When using weights in evaluating purchases, it is quite easy to add a little bit here or there without the purchaser catching on. Nobody can deny, intuitively, that there is something wrong about this. What stands out most in this verse, though, is the connection between yetziyas mitzrayim – the Exodus – and this commandment. What does one have to do with the other?

Rashi offers two explanations:

“for this purpose. Another interpretation: I distinguished in Egypt between the firstborn and those who were not firstborn, and I am faithful to exact punishment from one who dips his weights in salt to cheat people who do not recognize [the deceit].”

Rashi's first explanation, then – “for this purpose” – teaches the very objective of the exodus of Egypt was for this specific commandment. In fact, Rashi is referencing a Midrash that elaborates this very point. In essence, according to this Midrash, God took the Jews out of Egypt based on the condition that they accept the commandments involving measurements (middos). This elevates the commandment to an entirely new sphere of importance. Are we to believe that the primary goal of the exodus was to make sure a nation of people conduct business with each other in an open and honest way? This is not to imply that it is unimportant; obviously, honesty in business dealings is imperative. However, this prohibition is not the first of the Ten Commandments – in fact, it did not even make the list, so to speak. How could Rashi (based on the Midrash) maintain that the entire Exodus hinged on adherence to this specific commandment?

The second explanation requires a little background information, as Rashi is again alluding to a Midrash. In that particular Midrash, we learn of an interesting plan concocted by many of the Egyptians upon hearing of the impending makas bechoros. It seems many men cohabitated with one woman, assuming that the status of first born would only fall upon the first child emerging from her womb. However, the



status of firstborn was actually determined by the father. Therefore, even though the woman may have given birth to ten children from ten different fathers, each child still had the status of bechor. The analogy, then, would go as follows: the Egyptians thought they could “fool” God with their surreptitious method of having children, so too the Jew who adds a little to the weight to cheat the purchaser is somehow fooling God. One could argue, then, that the purpose of this mitzvah is to combat the more-common-than-we-think emotion of “getting away with it.” Much like a rebelling yet guilt-ridden child who hides his indiscretions from his parents, the person here rationalizes his actions, assuming that somehow God won’t “get him.” And yet, it could be there is a deeper message here.

Let’s tackle the first problem. It is hard to imagine that the condition for taking the Jews out of Egypt was their adherence to this specific commandment. What then, does Rashi mean? One possible answer lies not in the action of cheating per se, but what it implies about the individual and his attachment to Judaism. One of the fundamental tenets of our religion involves our understanding of our place in the universe relative to God. This is contained within the idea of yiras Hashem (fear of God), outlined by the Rambam in the Mishneh Torah. The realistic view of the self means, by definition, a redirection of one’s ego from focusing on the importance of the self to the realization that we are no more than afar

v’efer, dust and ashes. The internalization of this attitude is a critical component of a person’s approach to Judaism. When this proper view of the self, relative to God, is in place, the person naturally relates to his fellow man honestly. The desire to take advantage of others, which is purely driven by a distorted sense of superiority, is absent. This could be, then, what Rashi is referring to. Taking advantage of another person surreptitiously expresses a distorted view of the self, indicating an inability to properly relate to fellow man, and indeed, God Himself.

The second explanation looks at this issue from a different vantage point. It is interesting that the plan of the Egyptians referenced in the Midrash surrounded the final plague, that of makas bechoros. God, according to the Midrash, is telling us that the attempt to trick Him was unsuccessful. One can imagine that this last plague was not the only time this approach was employed by the Egyptians. The key here is the distinction between the last plague and the others. In general, God used the plagues as a means to demonstrate His control over the natural world. However, the last plague was unique. Whereas the other plagues were all sourced in nature, albeit with variations that could only emerge from a Divine Source, the last plague had no source within nature. To afflict a specific group of people, tied together by an accidental characteristic of being first born, at a specific time on a specific day, has no source within the natural world. It demonstrated a quality of control different than the other plagues, the revelation of God as Omniscient. Therefore, the foiling of the Egyptians’ plan served one purpose: to demonstrate this degree of control is only within God’s means. This analogy would seem to carry through to the instance of the Jew who tries to secretly rip off his fellow Jew. A person who engages in this type of behavior is ultimately revealing a deep problem, his actions question God’s Omniscience. No doubt, the childish notion of “fooling God” is a driving emotion here. At the same time, though, the philosophical implications of such a mentality ultimately reveal a question of God’s complete control. This outlook, obviously, is extremely harmful and dangerous to the individual.

We can see now how this commandment is more than simply a guide in appropriate ethical behavior, more complex than an extension of the idea of being nice to our fellow man. Based on the above elucidations of Rashi, it would seem the violation of this principle represents a serious philosophical defect. One might ask, “what’s the harm in a few pennies to my benefit?” As we have shown, the harm is incalculable. ■

(Perfection continued from page 1)

Mitzvah

The message is clear: God does not desire us to merely go through the 'motions' of the mitzvahs. That is what He means that He did not command us on sacrifice: on sacrifice per se, we are not commanded. Radak says mitzvahs have an objective, and are not a goal in themselves. The objective is that through mitzvah, man accepts God, His authority and infinite knowledge, and follows Him...as the second verse states above. Mitzvahs are, in part, to redirect man from his egotistical and instinctual focus, towards God. Mere, technical actions (mitzvahs) cannot perfect man, since we possess intellect as our primary feature. Similarly, an automobile cannot be perfected as transportation, regardless of the perfected paint job, if we do not tend to the engine. Thus, mitzvahs address our values, and if only performed by rote, the goal is missed. Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak catches our ear with his startling statement above, teaching the same idea.

We must move past the performances and respect God's authority. If one performs mitzvahs without understanding them, or with the notion that the very act of the mitzvah is all God desires, then that person misses the objective.

Parshas Kedoshim teaches this lesson. One might think our "Book of Laws" is just that: a life where the action is all which God desires, and where the internal world is irrelevant. "I did the mitzvah"...people say to themselves with a false sense of total satisfaction. But the fact that the Torah must include Parshas Kedoshim, teaches many lessons.

Perfection is Not Legislated

Without Parshas Kedoshim, a false message would be communicated. Man might think he is to gain perfection through rote activities. But Kedoshim teaches a great fundamental.

Man typically seeks instinctual gratification. But his conscience weighs on him. He figures a solution: "I'll keep the Torah, but then when I am done praying and studying my token 10 minutes today, I will allow myself all the permitted foods, unrestrained sexual activity, and drink. I'll do the bare minimum to satisfy the commands, and with the rest of my time I will satisfy my instinctual, and I'll feel justified as living in line with Torah." These are the unspoken but undeniable sentiments that pervade the thoughts of many Jews. But why does the Torah allow so many Parshas and commands to go by, offering man this false assumption? Why doesn't each mitzvah have right next to it in the Torah, the underlying,

moral or intellectual perfection? Perhaps by doing so, another error would be made, as people would say, "Oh...THAT's why we have that mitzvah? Well, I already possess that perfected trait, and therefore, I am exempt from this law". With such responses, the Torah would not be upheld, and would quickly vanish from our people.

Therefore, Torah laws must be written without qualification. But the Torah must also correct the first error: man's assumption that the act per se is all God wants. Therefore, God includes Kedoshim. Kedoshim means "separate" or sanctified, as in separating ourselves from our instincts. For man can follow all of the laws, and still overindulge, a "Menuval b'rishuss haTorah", "despicable within Torah confines". God thereby teaches that the mitzvahs are only Step 1.

Additionally, as wise Rabbi mentioned, the Torah cannot legislate perfection. Similarly, the Torah cannot tell man what he believes. We can be told what to "do", but not what to believe. Thus, the Torah cannot tell a person to have the trait of kindness as a command. But it can guide man in actions that can engender this trait, and the Torah does underline this and many other traits in other areas.

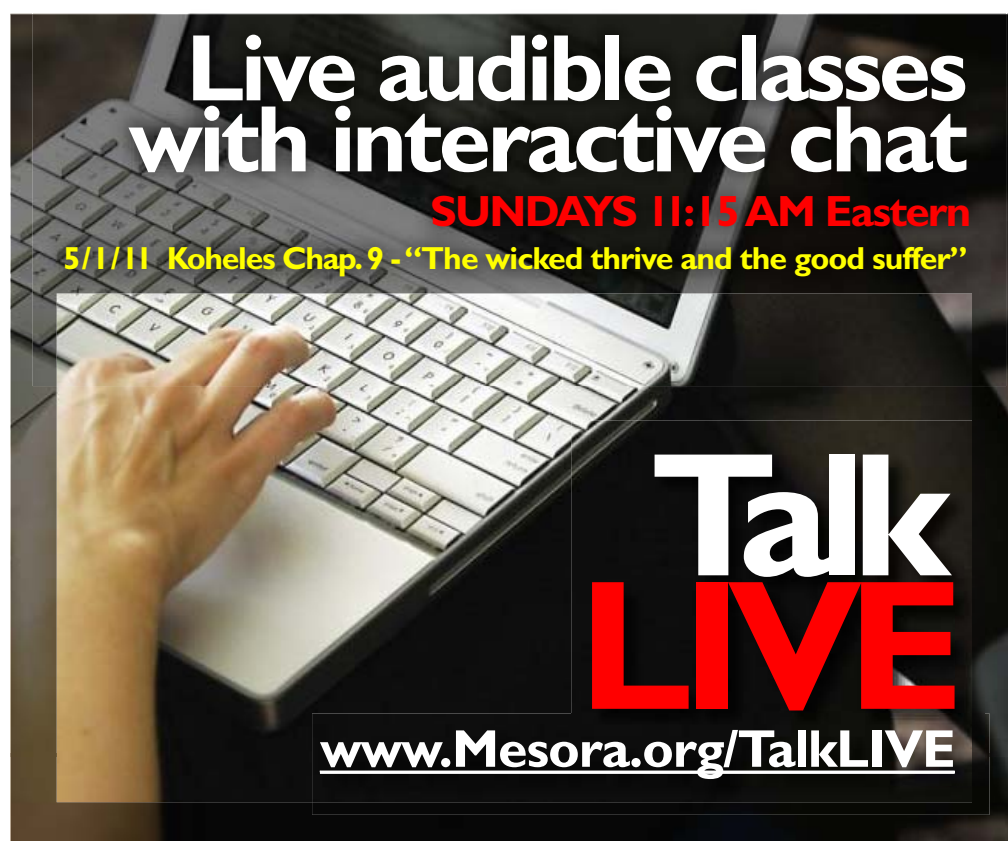
No matter how much we want to carry a pristine, righteous self-image, the truth must be admitted: we are instinctual beings. No one is born perfected. No one is missing the ego drive, or any other instinct. And these drives make us feel good when satisfied. All this must be admitted, if we are to realize the lessons in Kedoshim – being sanctified.

How Torah Perfects Man

The Written Torah teaches us the individual headings of each mitzvah. And depending on the mitzvah's primary focus, certain aspects are highlighted and some not addressed, in the Written Law. But these are merely the broad strokes. The Oral Law (Mishna and Talmud) then elucidate all details of the objects of mitzvah and the "who, how and when". And although many of the Prophets and Writings address the true, underlying perfection targeted by the mitzvahs, the Five Books cannot be bereft of such a fundamental. Kedoshim is vital.

Kedoshim begins by subduing man's ego, as taught by Rabbi Reuven Mann. "Fear of God is the beginning of knowledge". (Proverbs; 1:7) Man is taught to fear his parents, and to accept God, through Sabbath. These two laws along

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with setting up courts were the first laws the Jews received in Mara, before arriving at Sinai. This is sensible, since God was progressively shedding the Egyptian authority and bringing us to accept Him. By drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea, we finally had no Egypt to run back to, as the Jews desired so many times when confronted with trials. And to now redirect their need for authority towards God, God gave the commands that cause man to accept authority: honoring parents, following courts, and observing Sabbath. Of course the first two target the acceptance of God. These laws are a necessary backdrop for all others. Thus, Kedoshim commences with them.

Man has many emotions, so our deviations are many. Although we are already warned against idolatry, the next verse (Lev. 19:4) warns us not to "turn" towards alien gods. Ibn Ezra says this refers to the "turning" of the heart...i.e., emotional consideration. To be truly Kadosh – holy – we must go further than simply not bowing to idols in action: we must also not consider them a reality at all. So we must remove this from our hearts. Kedoshim is telling us that our inner corruptions are many, what those corruptions are, and how to refrain.

Specifically, Kedoshim is urging our actions and thoughts be exclusively dedicated to God. That is Kedoshim's key message.

Man constantly seeks instinctual gratification. By studying Kedoshim, we learn where our instinctual natures seek outlets. By restraining ourselves from the more subtle modes of gratification, we become Kadosh. We become the men and women God gave us the potential to be. God also told Abraham to be "tamim", perfect. Meaning, that God's will was that Abraham – and mankind – be exclusively dedicated to God in "all" our actions. One who seeks to perfect himself must dedicate all of his actions in service to God's will...which is truly the greatest benefit to the self. This doesn't mean he doesn't enjoy a meal, family, vacation or other pleasures God created. It means all he that does targets the goal of acting as God deemed proper.

In this verse (ibid) we are also told not to create molten gods. Why are molten gods singled out here?

This verse has a theme: do not give in to your imaginations. Shema says the same, "Do not stray after your hearts and after your eyes..." How are molten gods different than bowing to the sun, moon, animals, trees, and rocks? How are they more imagined?

In all other cases, at least man is bowing to something real. But when man creates a molten image of a fish-god as did the Philistines, even the object itself is completely removed from reality, and man's deviation is greater. Man's imagination created the object of his worship, unlike sun worship where at least the sun is real, and is truly important.

Kedoshim also discusses those who curse the deaf and cause the blind to stumble, also referring to offering poor counsel. In such cases, since the victim was unaware of the true, evil intent of the sinner, the sinner might feel innocent. This is because many people's barometers for sin, is whether they are caught. This subtlety too is mentioned in Kedoshim.

One also sins by retaining the property due other longer than necessary. In this case, one might justify himself by saying "I eventually paid him, so where's my sin?" But the sin is in not treating another, as he would want for himself. Even in this slight manner, the sinner expressed some aggression towards another human being.

Even man's twisted "good will" is exposed. For some judges pity the poor, or don't want to defame those who are rich or popular, so they decide the case in their favor...against true justice. Here too man is warned to detect this emotion in himself, and to follow justice, not people.

And what if I didn't try to save a life...did I really kill the person? Rashi teaches this man is punished. There is so much more to discuss...

Summary

Kedoshim is a great study into our nature as instinctually-driven creatures. It teaches that the commands alone are not God's will, but He desires us to truly desire Him, in thought and action, as Jeremiah taught.

With God's lessons, we can identify our faults, and train ourselves in His truths. Man can even perform mitzvahs his entire life, and yet, harbor many corruptions. This is what the Torah and Rabbis teach: God does not want our mitzvahs – as an ends – but He desires our perfection. And only patient study under a trained teacher will bring us to understand God's true will. We cannot imagine it, or obtain it by simple reading. The Mesora – the transmission from Sinai – is essential for learning God's will, and for learning how to think.

Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak does not mean we are allowed to sin, even with good intentions. Thus, we cannot hold back charity, even if we intend thereby to force a person to take a job, for his own good. He means that it is not the external mitzva or sin that is primary, but our internal world that determines our perfection. ■

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Sinai's Significance

Chaim: Two points:

1) Why isn't there a separate paragraph in the Shmoneh Esrei devoted to asking Hashem to help us strengthen our belief in Revelation at Sinai? Many, many Jews have gone astray because they lack the important belief that the Revelation truly occurred. We should pray to God, everyday, to ask Him to remove the elements of doubt in our minds, that the Revelation did happen.

2) Our conviction and belief that it really did occur is based on a "NEGATIVE" conclusion: Down through time, there "never" was found written books, or other concrete evidence, supporting the idea that the Revelation didn't take place. Wouldn't belief be better reinforced through "Positive" proof?

Doesn't the high rate of assimilation in today's Jewish society, justify our Rabbis adding another important paragraph to the Shmoneh Esrei, namely, to remove the elements of doubt in our minds, that the Revelation ever happened, and strengthen our beliefs that it indeed, did occur?

Thank you,
Chaim - Monsey, NY

Rabbi: 1) You are correct, that Revelation should find its place in our prayers. In fact, the Talmud teaches that in prior years, the Rabbis included the Ten Commandments in the prayers. However, the Rabbis ended that practice once the heretics told Jews that all that exists, are these Ten Commands, and no others. Nonetheless, the fundamental nature of the Ten Commands (Revelation) is recognized.

Perhaps though, asking God to help us be convinced, of anything, is not within Torah law and philosophy. Our personal convictions belong to the realm of our individually-expressed, free will. Just as we do not ask God, "Help me do this mitzvah" while we are fully capable, we also are out of place asking Him to help us believe anything. God's will is that we exert ourselves to arrive at truths, and perform actions. We cannot ask Him to make us think something, when this is already within our abilities. The importance of Revelation at Sinai is certainly stressed by God, Moses and all Rabbis, but our beliefs is up to us. This is God's will.

2) Regarding your comment about negative knowledge, I do not agree that Revelation is accepted since there's no other account. While that is true, Revelation is accepted based on mass transmission: a "positive" reality. The generations and masses transmitting a single story removes any motive for fabrication, as a lie requires motivation, and masses cannot share a common motive. And as the event of Revelation was easily-comprehended phenomena, by a typical person's senses and intellect, we have no grounds to assume the event was misconstrued. Once fabrication and misconception are eliminated, a given history must be true. For we have removed all possibilities of error in transmission. The positive truth of Revelation thereby remains unchallenged. This is based on the words of the Kuzari, and Maimonides as explained by Rabbi Israel Chait.

While assimilation is high, God knew what would transpire throughout all generations. Therefore, He included the tenets and necessary commands in Torah to ensure Torah survives throughout time. He also gave the Rabbis the right to create fences to protect Torah laws. Only if the Rabbis deem the lack of conviction in Revelation relate to a Torah command, can they create a Rabbinic law to protect Revelation's loss. But beyond protecting a Torah law, the Rabbis have no jurisdiction. ■

Providence

Reader: I agree with you that there is a certain point when someone is worthy of receiving Hashgacha pratit – individual divine providence – but no one can ever know if they reach that point unless they attain prophecy. So is it wrong to look at unfortunate events in your life and use them as wake up calls? Or to think that G-d is involved in your life at all since that would be total arrogance?

Rabbi: The Talmud suggests one introspects upon unfortunate experiences. For this could be a "wake up call". Regardless, if one improves his/her ways due to such an event, he/she benefits, whether it was divine providence, or chance. But without an outright miracle or prophecy, one cannot say for certain that God caused any event. There simply is no way to determine this. And yes, it could be arrogance that compels one to say "God is doing this to me". ■

Subservience

Reader: What does it mean when G-d says in Genesis, "man shall rule over woman"?

Rabbi: This means that Eve (woman), having expressed dominance by coercing man to eat the forbidden fruit, she will now be corrected, and made psychologically subservient. She will view man in a dominant light. This counters woman's dominant streak possessed prior to the sin, allowing both parties to be more free from each other, so as to follow God. ■

Letters

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Weekly Parsha

a Lesson on
KEDOSHIM



MAN

can Become
Holy



RABBI REUVEN MANN

The theme of this week's parsha, Kedoshim, is that of holiness. We are commanded to be holy because "I the L—d your G-d am holy." At first glance this concept is astounding as it seeks to make some kind of comparison between man and Hashem. The basic teaching of Judaism is that G-d is a being who is beyond the comprehension of any human even the most exalted prophet such as Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe beseeched G-d to "show me your glory" which Maimonides takes to mean a description of G-d's essence. The reply of Hashem was "no man can see Me while he lives." This means that G-d's nature is intrinsically unknowable. He cannot be compared at all to any of His creatures. The concept of holiness can be applied to man. How are we to understand the assertion of our parsha that G-d is holy?

Perhaps the answer lies in a more precise understanding of the idea of human holiness. Man has a dual nature. He is a creature of flesh and blood with ordinary corporeal impulses. In this sense he is no different than any animal. On the other hand he was endowed with a Divine element, the soul, which was created in "the image" of G-d. There is a part

of man which reflects the "Divine." This enables him to reason, gain understanding and recognize the source of all existence, the Creator of the Universe. Man has been endowed with choice. He alone determines the type of existence he wants to lead. He can defer to the pull of his drives and live as an instinctual being whose only goal is to use his intelligence in the service of desire. He can also decide to "be holy" ie. to separate himself from the animalistic part of his make up and live in accordance with the higher aspect of his personality, the tzelem elokim. The pasuk is telling us that we can choose to live an existence which is based on emulating the actions of the Creator. When we say that G-d is holy we mean, separate, unique, the most perfect and exalted form of existence. Hashem is telling us that though we are made of flesh, He implanted within us an element that allows us, in however small a way, to live a life which reflects the holiness of our Creator. When we choose this path of existence we bring joy to ourselves, and earn everlasting life and sanctify the name of Hashem on earth. May we respond with wisdom and inspiration to the injunction to become holy, as individuals and as a nation. Shabbat Shalom. ■



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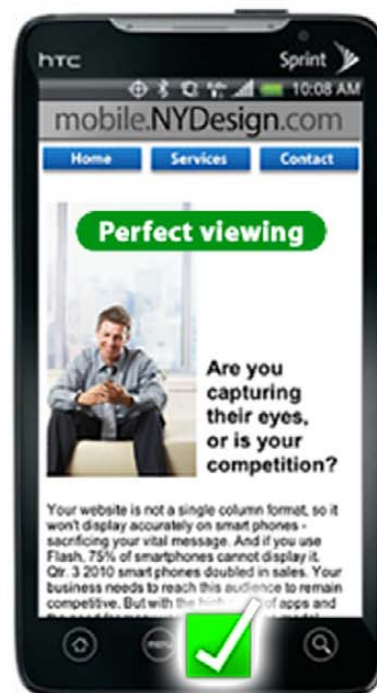
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