

אֲשֶׁרֵינוּ
קְדוּשִׁים

אחרי מות - קדושים
Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

אשרינו Ashreinu

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Longing for that Cheeseburger

Rabbi Ben Sugerman

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Sometimes you will overhear the following seemingly idle chatter from segments of our *chevra* that goes something like this...

“If we weren’t obligated to keep the laws of Kashrut, what would be the first restaurant you would go to?” (My answer is KFC.)

This is seemingly a nonsensical conversation that does nothing more than occupy time and contains no value.

And meanwhile, Rashi in this week’s Parsha quotes

from the Sifra:

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר מנין שלא יאמר אדם נפשי קצה בבשר חזיר, אי אפשי ללבוש כלאים, אבל יאמר אפשי, ומה אעשה ואבי שבשמים גזר עלי, תלמוד לומר ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי, שתהא הבדלתכם מהם לשמי, פורש מן העבירה ומקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים:

“One should not say, I am disgusted by pig’s meat, and I have no desire to wear Shaatnez (a garment made of wool and linen) but rather a person should say, “I would like to do these things but what am I to do? My Father in Heaven forbade me from engaging in these activities.” What is the source of this idea? The Torah states (Vayikra 20:26): “I have separated you from the other nations to be mine,” implying that our separation from these other nations should be solely for Hashem’s sake.”

It is clear from this Chazal that our abstention from *aveirot* is not intended to for us to assign any kind of value regarding the item that is forbidden, but rather we abstain to show our commitment to our Father in



Heaven. In and of itself this is a powerful idea, but upon further reflection, is that always true?

Let's take murder for example. Are we suggesting that there is nothing inherently wrong with murder and the only reason that I haven't exterminated another human's life today is because the Torah says it's forbidden? Does this mean that we are not to inculcate within ourselves any sense of moral lesson based on the commandments of the Torah? Brought to its conclusion, Chazal are telling us that adherence to the Torah is not at all connected to a moral construct but simply a way of showing our dedication to our Creator, which although seems like the correct conclusion, certainly doesn't sit well.

The Rambam writes an introduction to Pirkei Avot commonly known as Shmoneh Perakim and addresses the issue. The Rambam in the 6th chapter notes that the ancient philosophers believe that it's a virtue to remove any and all desires for those things that are forbidden and we must hardwire ourselves to hate that which is forbidden. In fact, the Rambam notes that Shlomo Hamelech seems to support this thinking, "the soul of the wicked desires evil." (Mishlei 21:10).

The Rambam patently rejects this notion. He cites the Chazal that we mentioned above. He cites the gemara that says, "Anyone who is greater than his friend, his *yetzer hara* is greater as well". He cites the mishna in Pirkei Avot, **לפום צערא אגרא** — "Reward is commensurate to the struggle that goes in." We are meant to desire these things and we are constantly challenged by these desires and life is and will always be a constant struggle and the goal is not to remove our desire for that which is forbidden, but continuously overcome it.

But what do we do with the pasuk from Mishlei? The Rambam goes on to explain that, truth be told, both positions are correct, but with the following fundamental distinction. When dealing with the *chukot ha-Torah*, the non-rational laws of the Torah like kashrut and shaatnez, we can't assign any kind of intrinsic lesson that we must learn from them. We abstain, simply to show our commitment to God. To those mitzvot that are sensible and rational, murder, theft, cheating and the like, we are obligated to not only follow these laws, but make them as part of the fabric of

who we are. We are to incorporate their value within us and actually come to detest their essence, as per the advice given in Mishlei.

All this leaves us with us one pressing issue. How do our classic commentaries, including the Rambam, ascribe reasons behind all of the mitzvot of the Torah? Based on the above Rambam, at least for the non-rational laws, the *chukot ha-Torah*, there should be no reasons provided for the mitzvot, as they are not to communicate any kind of moral lesson! And yet, the Rambam, the Sefer Hachinuch, and many others explain the reasons behind these mitzvot.

It's important to remember the following comment of the Rambam from Moreh Nevuchim (3:26): even when offering a reason behind a mitzvah, we can only understand it in its broadest sense, but once we head into the details of any given mitzvah it goes beyond our understanding. For example, we can't *shecht* a mother and its offspring on the same day. Presumably this instills within a sense of compassion, but meanwhile we can shecht the mother right before sunset and the offspring right after! Our limited understanding only allows us to understand mitzvot in their very broad sense, but we can't fathom the depths of the mitzvot after that.

As for the cheeseburger, our Father in Heaven has told us to look at the cheeseburger, think of how good it may taste, and then say "but we have a relationship with God, so..."

Moving in the Right Direction

Yoni Kurtz ('20)

In this week's parsha we find a somewhat confusing mitzvah. Hashem says:

לֹא-תִקְלַל חֵרֶשׁ וְלִפְנֵי עֵוֵר לֹא תִתֵּן מְכֹשֶׁל וְיִרְאֵת
מֵאַלְקִיךָ אֲנִי ה'

"Do not curse a deaf person, and before a blind person do not place a stumbling block, and you shall fear your God, I am Hashem" (Vayikra 19:14).

While this commandment is humane and logical, its inclusion in the Torah seems to be unnecessary. There are other pesukim which address our requirement to

treat others in a humane fashion. What does this pasuk add? Many commentators have interpreted this pasuk in a nonliteral manner, using it to prohibit giving bad advice or misleading someone who does not know any better. But, this interpretation does not solve the issue either. After all, there are also other pesukim which prohibit deception. In fact, just three pesukim earlier, the Torah states:

“וְלֹא־תִשְׁקֹרוּ אִישׁ בְּעַמִּיתוֹ”

“And do not lie, one man to another” (19:11).

So what lesson is Hashem trying to teach us?

To properly understand this pasuk, one must analyze it in its entirety. The pasuk concludes with a statement telling us to fear Hashem. In adding this to the previous clause, the Torah is trying to teach us a lesson. If one afflicts a blind or deaf person in a manner in which the victim will not realize who caused the harm, one might think that they “got away with it.” After all, such a person might say, if the person is unaware of me, am I really doing anything wrong? The response to this is immediate. Hashem says, fear Me because I am Hashem and I see all. This message jives nicely with last week’s parsha as well, which details the laws of *tzara’at*. Just as a blind person can not see one placing the block, and the deaf person can not hear one curse them, a person who has been slandered may be completely unaware that they have been wronged. Nonetheless, Hashem dedicates an entire parsha to detailing the punishment for one who sins in this manner.

Hashem wants to stress both fear of God and respect for all people. These are two excellent traits to use as guiding points for all of one’s actions in life. In fact, disregard of these two mitzvot is why the first two Batei Mikdash were destroyed. May we merit the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash as we fulfill the two integral mitzvot of fear of God and respect for all people.



Knowledge is Power

Akiva Rosenthal ('20)

The first of the two parshiot this week is called Acharai Mot because it begins with the aftermath of the death of Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu. The two kohanim had good intentions, but weren’t careful enough in how they served Hashem. They got drunk and entered the Beit Hamikdash, which is already a violation. Then they went into the Kodesh Hakodashim, which is also prohibited, and gave a korban to Hashem. A fire came down and swallowed the brothers, and even though Aharon understood their punishment was fair, he was warned about going into the Kodesh Hakodashim. But why is Aharon reminded of this law if he wasn’t the one at fault?

The Darkei Mussar and Rav Aharon Kotler offer two answers to this question, and both answers have the theme of the level at which Hashem cares for us. Aharon might not have sinned like his sons, but Hashem wanted to show the gravity of his position as Kohen Gadol. Maybe Hashem wanted to protect Aharon, so by feeling a personal connection to the sin, he, like all of us, was less likely to succumb to sinning in a similar fashion. Secondly, when we read about one the purest Jews to ever live being reprimanded, it makes us realize the high level Aharon was on and the difficulty of his job. Although, it also lets us picture the reality of becoming close to Hashem because we don’t have to be perfect. It isn’t enough to know what you must do, you have to act upon it. This is the reason why only Esav’s head ended up in Ma’arat Hamachpela. He learned Torah, but wasn’t careful about incorporating it into every action, so Hashem decided that only his brain was righteous enough to be buried with the forefathers.

The lesson we can learn is to be thankful for opportunities Hashem gives us to succeed and take advantage by using our stored Torah knowledge and doing mitzvot.

Loving Your Neighbor as Yourself

Aharon Brandwein ('19)

If I had to explain in the simplest way possible what Jewish unity was, I'd say: a wall. A wall, each brick as important as the other. When completed it's beautiful, indomitable in structure, a force to be reckoned with, but without the cement to seal it, everything comes falling down. That precious cement is love.

Parshat Kedoshim establishes one of the core, essential values of Judaism “וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ” “love your fellow as you love yourself” (19:18). The Torah's reasoning for loving someone as yourself is as simple as it is profound. It's very hard to love someone else because it requires that we accept, respect, and care for them. Accepting someone for who they are is the foundation of love; if we don't accept them, we don't respect them and so we don't truly love them (we love only what we wish that person could be). However, even if we accept that person, caring for someone often implies that we don't accept them for who they are, because when we care, we strive to change the person we accepted, harnessing his or her potential to be what we think is better (even when it may not be).

But, somehow, I'm able to love myself. I accept myself, recognizing my imperfections and understanding how they're a part of me. I respect myself and take care of myself, while striving for improvement even in my darkest times and making myself better today, for tomorrow, from the mistakes I made yesterday. I am incredible and I truly, full-heartedly love myself. Want to know what the Torah means by loving someone like oneself? Just apply this paragraph to anyone, and replace all the I's with **you's**.

The love we have for ourselves shouldn't be seen as a selfish trait, but rather one we can use to help others when needed. One day we will break down our beautiful wall (after all, it's only temporary and for protection), and hopefully (with the help of Hashem) build an even more beautiful **bridge** of *geulah*, built upon the same foundation of love, and cross over *galut* onto the path of righteousness and Hashem.

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