

PARSHAS KEDOSHIM

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Parshas Kedoshim

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We read in our parashah (19:23), "When you shall come to the Land and you shall plant any food tree . . ." The Midrash Tanchuma relates about this verse: Hashem said to Bnei Yisrael, "Even though you will find Eretz Yisrael full of good things, don't say, 'We will sit and not plant.' Rather, you should take care to plant. Just as you entered the Land and found the plantings that others had planted, so, too, you should plant for your children." [Until here from the Midrash Tanchuma]

The Midrash Vayikra Rabbah also comments on our verse: The Torah commands (Devarim 13:5), "Hashem, your Elokim, you shall follow, and Him shall you fear; His commandments you shall observe and to His voice you shall listen; Him you shall serve and to Him you shall attach yourselves." The midrash asks: Is it possible to "follow" Hashem and to attach oneself to Him, about whom it is written (Tehilim 77:20), "In the sea was Your way, and Your path went through mighty waters; and Your footsteps were not known"? The midrash answers: At the beginning of Creation, Hashem's occupation was planting, as it is written (Bereishit 2:8), "Hashem Elokim planted a garden in Eden." You, too, when you enter Eretz Yisrael, should engage first thing in planting. [Until here from Midrash Vayikra Rabbah] The commentary Etz Yosef (19th century) explains: At first glance, planting is a physical act, not a spiritual act. No, says the midrash. The sanctity of Eretz Yisrael is similar to the sanctity of Gan Eden; therefore, planting in Eretz Yisrael to strengthen the settlement there is equivalent to establishing Gan Eden as a place for mankind to be created.

"Speak to the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I, Hashem, your Elokim, am holy. Every man, your father and mother you shall revere, and My Sabbaths you shall observe -- I am Hashem, your Elokim.'" (19:2-3)

Rashi z"l comments: "'You shall be holy'-This means, keep aloof from [sin]."

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) writes: If a person refrains from sin for his own purposes, he cannot be called "aloof from sin." Such a person is not distant from sin; it just happens not to be convenient for him. This is why our verse says, "You shall be holy, for I, Hashem, your Elokim, am holy." Just as Hashem does nothing for His own needs--since He has no needs--so your holiness should not be motivated by selfishness.

R' Kluger continues: The next verse ("Every man, your father and mother you shall revere") reinforces this message. The midrash relates that, when Hashem began to give the Aseret Ha'dibrot, the nations of the world said, "It's all for His honor!" But, when He said, "Honor your father and your mother," they realized that they were mistaken. Hashem did not give the mitzvot for His own good, but for ours.

R' Kluger concludes: The second half of this verse continues this theme. If not for this verse, we would think that Shabbat was given solely so that we could acknowledge that Hashem "rested" following Creation, whereby we acknowledge Creation itself. No, says Hashem, Shabbat is not (solely) for My honor, but a day of rest for you. This is the meaning of the Shabbat morning prayer, "Praise, honor and greatness let them render to Kel, the King Who fashioned everything, Who gives a heritage of rest to His People, Yisrael, in His holiness on the holy Shabbat day." Shabbat is a day to praise and honor Him, but He, in His holiness, is more interested in the fact that He has given us a day of rest. (She'eilot U'teshuvot Shenot Chaim, addendum to No. 147)

"You shall not be a gossip-monger among your people, you shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed -- I am Hashem. You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reprove your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him." (19:16-17)

R' Yaakov Abuchatzera z"l (1790-1879; Morocco) writes: This is a warning to tzaddikim not to speak ill of other Jews. Even Moshe Rabbeinu was punished when he spoke badly about Bnei Yisrael. Do not stand idly by while the blood of other Jews is shed because of their sins. Rather, pray that they will repent. Also rebuke them as necessary in order to help them repent. (Pituchei Chotam)

"You shall love your fellow as yourself -- I am Hashem." (19:18)

Rashi z"l writes: This is a major principle of the Torah.

We read in Tehilim (139:21), "For indeed, those who hate You, Hashem, I hate them." R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) observes that, unlike the quoted verse from our parashah, the foregoing verse from Tehilim is never cited, neither in Rambam's legal code nor in the Shulchan Aruch, as the source for any halachah. Nevertheless, there are many observant Jews who choose to be meticulous in their "practice" of the verse in Tehilim at the expense of practicing the

quoted verse from the Torah. Placing a verse from Psalms ahead of a mitzvah in the Torah indicates confused priorities, suggests R' Kook.

Furthermore, R' Kook notes, King David stated many other "nice" things in Tehilim, for example (63:2), "My soul thirsts for You." Are we as meticulous in observing these verses as we are in hating those whom we believe hate Hashem? (Sichot Harav Zvi Yehuda: Moadim p.53)

The Gemara (Shabbat 31a) relates that a prospective convert asked the sage Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while he (the convert) stood on one foot. Hillel told him, "What is hateful to you, do not do to others. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary; go learn it." The convert was not being flippant, explains R' Shlomo Ephraim of Lunschitz z"l (1545-1619; author of the Torah commentary Kli Yakar and other works). Rather, he wished to be taught a principle that would help him grasp the entire Torah.

If so, writes R' Shlomo Ephraim, we can understand how all mitzvot bein adam l'chavero / between man and his fellow can be encompassed within Hillel's principle. However, how does that principle encompass mitzvot bein adam la'Makom / between man and G-d? He explains:

There is no person who never sins. Human nature, however, is that man cannot see his own shortcomings. Therefore, he needs others to point out his failings to him. When there is love between each person and his fellow, they can help each other in this regard. That is why the Torah places in adjacent verses (19:17-18) the commandments: "You shall reprove your fellow" and "You shall love your fellow as yourself." If one hates his fellow, he will not help him correct his failings. To the contrary, he will rejoice at the other person's downfall and will look forward to Divine retribution upon that person for his sins. [Sadly, R' Shlomo Ephraim adds: "as is the custom in our generation."]

Also, if one loves Hashem with all his heart, then he will desire that which Hashem desires. Since Hashem desires that every person be found to be meritorious, the person who loves Hashem will desire that as well. For these two reasons--first, that we are all dependent on the good will of others to point out areas where we can improve, and second, that loving others and seeking their merit is an expression of our love of Hashem--Hillel's statement about the importance of interpersonal relationships is a fitting guide to the performance of mitzvot bein adam la'Makom just as it is for mitzvot bein adam l'chavero. (Orach L'chaim, Introduction)

Pirkei Avot

It is customary upon completing each chapter of Pirkei Avot (as well as before the Kaddish that follows many types of learning--see Mishnah Berurah 54:9) to recite the last Mishnah in Tractate Makkot: "Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya says, 'The Holy One, Blessed is He, wished to confer merit upon the Jewish People; therefore He gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance'."

The story is told of a teenager who approached R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995; one of the leading halachic authorities of the second half of the 20th century) and asked about this Mishnah: What merit do all of the mitzvot confer? To the contrary, the young man asserted, the mitzvot are a source of obligation and subjugation!

"An excellent question!" R' Auerbach replied, and he explained as follows: "There are many activities that a person--Jew or gentile--performs daily as a matter of course. These include: washing upon awakening, getting dressed, putting on shoes, etc. Look at Hashem's kindness! Because He wants to confer merit upon His children, the Jewish People, He has given us detailed instructions how to perform activities we would have performed anyway--how to wash our hands [three times on each hand], how to dress, how to put on our shoes [right shoe first], how to tie our shoes [left shoe first], etc."

R' Auerbach continues, paraphrasing the prayer that is recited at a siyum: "We put on our shoes and they put on their shoes. We put on our shoes and receive reward [for performing a mitzvah], while they put on their shoes but receive no reward [for they have no such mitzvah]. We tie our shoes and they tie their shoes. We tie our shoes and receive reward, while they tie their shoes but receive no reward." This, concluded R' Auerbach, is the meaning of the verse (Tehilim 62:13), "Yours, Master, is kindness, for You pay each man according to his deeds." How is it a kindness to pay a person what he deserves? Rather, the kindness is that Hashem pays us for the mundane deeds that we would do in any case. (Minchat Avot p.41)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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