

BE A HOLY NATION!

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha, Kedoshim, begins with the commandment "Kedoshim tiyu" (19:2). We, Bnei Yisroel, are commanded to be holy. Rashi writes that this means abstention from forbidden relationships.

The Ramban has a different understanding. The Torah warns us not to eat certain foods and allows the consumption of others. Incestuous and adulterous relationships are forbidden while normal marital relationships are the fulfillment of a commandment. This opens the opportunity for a person to be what the Ramban terms a "novol b'rshus haTorah" - a lowlife who manages to stay just within the parameters of the Torah.

This, he explains, is the opening warning of our Parsha. "Kedoshim tiyu"! Be a holy nation! Use my commandments to learn to limit yourselves, to elevate yourselves, to be a nation that serves as an example- kedoshim tiyu!

Amongst the commandments that follow is one of the most well known mitzvos- "V'ahavta l'rayacha kamocho" (19:18). The simple meaning is to love your friend as yourself. Targum Yonasan explains these words to mean, 'that which you wouldn't want done to you, don't do to your friend'.

The gemara Shabbos (31a) tells a story of a convert who approached the sage Hillel. "Teach me the Torah while I stand on one foot!", he demanded from Hillel. Hillel's concise answer, as this person tried to maintain his balance, was: that which you wouldn't want done to you, don't do to your friend.

The request of this convert is usually viewed as insincere. Hillel's answer reveals to us his humility, patience and willingness to go that extra distance to help any person.

The Kli Yakar, however, writes that this was a righteous and sincere convert who was searching for the very foundation of the mitzvos. Hillel told him "v'ahavta l'rayacha kamocho", and also the last two words of the pasuk, "ani Hashem" - I am Hashem.

Our mitzvos are divided into two main categories: 1) those between man and man, and 2) those between man and Hashem. The foundation of proper behavior amongst other people is simply that if you wouldn't want it done to you, don't do it to them. The foundation of our relating to Hashem is having belief in Him- believing in Ani Hashem. Hillel's answer to the sincere convert.

It's been said that the most important lessons of life are learned in kindergarten. If you wouldn't want

it done to you then don't do it to them. So obvious, yet so elusive!

How does one fulfill this? Can we really love others as ourselves? When looking at a group picture, is there anyone out there whose searching glance isn't trying to find him/herself!?

Rav Dessler writes that the way to develop a love for another person is, not by receiving from him but, rather, by giving to him. In a parent/child relationship, the parent clearly gives more than the child. What follows is that the greater love flows in the direction of the parent to the child.

When you give to another, a part of you becomes incorporated in that other person. He becomes an extension of you. When you look at him, you see yourself. The parent, after having given so much, sees the child as an extension of himself. "That's my boy!" "Chip off the old block!" The more you give, the more you identify with him.

Love your friend as yourself. Give to him and those distinctions of self and other become blurred! He becomes 'yourself'! 'Love your friend as yourself' becomes an obtainable goal if we are willing to give!

I've often thought how Hashem has arranged the natural cycle of our lives to have us emulate Him and to transform us into 'givers'. An infant only receives. As he grows older he learns to give to others but still leads an egocentric existence. At the stage of marriage, one learns to give and receive on an equal basis. He then becomes a parent and is transformed into a total giver.

Our parsha also discusses one of the most barbaric avoda zaras (forms of idol worship) - molech. A parent would pass his child through columns of fire, burning the child to death as a sacrifice to this idol. The Sforno writes that after being shown that the intention of Hashem is to sanctify Yisroel through our emulating Him, we are shown and warned about the opposite end of the spectrum - molech.

The pasuk states that if one passes "mizar'oh", of his children, to molech, "mos yumas", he is put to death (20:2). The gemara Sanhedrin (64b) derives that if one would pass all of his children to molech, he will not be put to death. This seems difficult to understand his offense is that much more grievous and he is not punished as harshly?!

In order to understand this we must understand capital punishment from the Torah's standpoint. It is neither a means of protecting society from this person nor is it an act of vengeance.

Let's view the world through the perspective of the Torah. A person is sent here for a short time in order to build a relationship with Hashem. This 'connecting' that is done without actually seeing Hashem will allow for a true and eternal connection in the world to come.

At times, one can do something which causes a breach in that relationship. The Torah prescribes, not a punishment, but the required steps to atone and remedy that relationship. The severity of the

breach will determine the degree of the remedy. Once that kaparah (atonement) has been done, the person continues with his life, attempting to build that relationship through the mitzvos, as he had been doing before.

Certain acts destroy the relationship to the degree that there is no point in continuing afterwards. The only way to mend that relationship is to go through the most intense tshuva process. To bring a korbon that is not a proxy for the person himself but rather is the person himself. Viduy (confession) is said, kiddush is made, and the person's purified soul is returned to it's Maker. He was able to, at the last moment of his earthly existence, remedy that breach.

What is done if the person's act was so hideous that even 'misas beis din', death at the hands of the court, won't atone? At that point, beis din's act would turn from an act of the ultimate and eternal kindness to an act of barbaric brutality! Such a person is not put to death.

If a person offers all of his sons to molech there is no atonement for him. The relationship has been shattered to the point that even this type of death won't remedy it. "Of his children", he is put to death, "all of his children", he is not.

We should merit to elevate ourselves into true 'givers', emulating our Creator and building that eternal relationship with Him.

Good Shabbos.

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