"LO SACHMOD": TWO APPROACHES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 712, The Kiddush Club. Good Shabbos!

The tenth of the Asserres HaDibros ["Ten Commandments"] is Lo Sachmod: "Do not covet your neighbor's house; do not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his slave, his donkey, his ox, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" [Shemos 20:13]. A person is not allowed to be jealous of his friend's possessions.

The Ibn Ezra wonders how the Torah can legislate against a person's desires. It is very natural for a person driving a jalopy to be jealous of a person who has a new car and does not have to worry about leaking oil and whether the car will start each time he turns the key in the ignition. If this is readily understandable in terms of our neighbor's car, it is certainly understandable in terms of more meaningful things in life. We see their families, we see their position, etc., etc. How does the Torah command a person not to be jealous?

The Ibn Ezra cites a parable which allows us to understand the proper approach to the prohibition of not coveting: No commoner ever thinks he will marry the princess. He knows that the princess is out of his league. It is human nature that one only has desires for things he can relate to. A person does not covet things which are so far removed from him that he considers them to be "out of his league". When the villager goes into the big city and sees the King's palace and sees the King's beautiful daughter, he does not even think "Oh, I wish I could marry her." He knows that such an occurrence is strictly beyond the realm of possibility in terms of his lineage and background. It is just not going to happen.

The Ibn Ezra says that an intelligent person must realize that people do not acquire spouses or possessions based on their wisdom or cleverness, but only based on the Will of G-d to grant him such. If a person has a beautiful house or car or wife, it is because the Almighty wanted him to have that. For whatever reason, it is G-d's Will that Reuven have these things and Shimmon not have them. The antidote a person must employ to avoid coveting, says Ibn Ezra, is Emunah [faith]. Namely, the faith that all his possessions are what G-d wants him to have and all of his neighbor's possessions are what G-d wants his neighbor to have.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brodie, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, suggests that the Ramba"n (in Parshas Kedoshim) has a different understanding of the "Lo Sachmod" command and a totally

different approach to the age old dilemma "How do I avoid being jealous?" The Ramban quotes a Medrash that refers to the repetition of the Asserres HaDibros in Parshas Kedoshim. For example, Parshas Kedoshim contains "I am the L-rd your G-d" [Vayikra 19:3] corresponding to the first of the ten. "Graven images you shall not make for yourselves" [19:4] corresponds to the second of the ten, and so on and so forth. The parallel in Parshas Kedoshim to the tenth commandment (Lo Sachmod) is the pasuk "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." [19:18]

Rav Simcha Zissel explains this Ramba"n as follows: When I see that someone has a better car than I do or a better house than I do and I want that car or house, the human emotion behind this desire is not driven strictly by desire for the car or house or wife but by the fact that I am better than him and why should he have something that I do not have. Really, I know that I can easily live with my old jalopy, but I can not live with the fact that my neighbor has a better car than I do! It is not lusting for money or women; it is the ability to come to terms with the fact that someone else has something that I do not have.

If I would love that person as I do myself, I would be quite okay with the fact that he had a beautiful car and house and wife. Let him have it! The proof of this fact is the Talmudic adage that one is jealous of everyone else except for his children and his students. We rarely see parents who are jealous of their children. Why is that? It is because one loves his children dearly and wants them to be even more successful in life than he himself was. If one really loves his fellow man, he will not be jealous of him. Thus, the Ramba"n advises, the way to overcome jealousy is to love one's neighbor as much as he loves himself.

Woe Is Me 'KI NIDMEISI'

The Haftorah of Parshas Yisro begins with Yeshaya's famous vision in which the prophet sees the Throne of Honor and the entire Heavenly Court. He sees winged angels calling to one another "Holy, Holy, Holy is Hashem, Master of Legions, the whole world is filled with His glory." The doorposts moved many cubits at the sound of the calling, and the house became filled with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is to me 'KI NIDMEISI'" [Yeshaya 6:1-5].

What is the meaning of the expression "KI NIDMEISI"? Rashi and Metzudos both interpret "for I will die" (from the word 'MEIS' - dead one). This is based on the idea that "No man can see Me and continue to live." [Shemos 33:20]. The prophet fears he has seen too much and his soul must now leave his body.

The Dubno Maggid gives an alternate interpretation. The word 'NIDMEISI' does not come from the root 'MEIS' [corpse] but from the root 'DIMYON' - imagination. Yeshaya is saying "Woe is to me, for I am living in an illusionary world." The Dubno Maggid, as is his custom, supplies a parable to explain.

There was once a small village composed of at most 20 people, all of whom were totally ignorant. It was such a poor and small village that they could not even afford a Rabbi. There was one Jew who

knew more than anyone else in the village and was considered the town scholar. What type of shaylos [questions] did they ask this Jew? -- "When do I have Yahrtzeit for my father?" "When is Rosh Chodesh going to be?" "When is my son going to become Bar Mitzvah?" Difficult questions!

The fact that he was asked all these questions by everyone eventually got to him. He thought that indeed he was the town Talmid Chochom! He received the most honorable aliyahs. He received honor from the people. He saw himself as an appropriate Rabbinic stand-in. One day this Jew had to travel to the big city. He came to shul in the big city and saw a group of people learning Ein Yaakov (a compilation of the Aggadic portion of Talmud). This is not the most taxing of texts and yet he was blown away by the discussion. He could not even understand what they were talking about. He assumed that he had walked into the shul of the great Torah scholars and figured that he was out of his league so he went to find another synagogue in which to pray.

The second shul was learning Mishnayos, a more complex text than Ein Yaakov, but also relatively elementary. Again he was clueless as to the subject matter being discussed. Suddenly it hit him that he was an ignoramus. He bemoans this sudden awareness of reality by wailing "Woe is me - 'KI NIDMEISI'" - I have been deceiving myself. I have been living in a world of my imagination. I thought that I was a scholar, a learned person. Woe is me for I have been imagining it all along! I now realize that I do not know the meaning of a simple Mishneh. I do not know who Tanaaim are I do not know who Amoraim are. I know nothing, despite the fact that I had been living as if I was a Torah scholar.

The Dubno Maggid compares this parable to Yeshaya's reaction upon seeing the Heavenly Court. "Here I thought I was a prophet, close to the Almighty. People used to come to me and I would give them advice. I am called a 'Man of G-d'. But now I glimpsed what it is really all about. I saw the angels, I saw Divine sanctity. Woe to me, for I have only imagined. In fact "I am a man of impure lips who dwells amidst an impure people."

We must be careful of this same phenomenon. We should guard ourselves against living in a fantasy world created by our own sense of pride. We have delusions of grandeur and of greatness if we picture ourselves as being overly holy or righteous. The most shocking revelation a person can experience is to wake up one day and realize "Woe is me, I see where I really am." Woe is me 'KI NIDMEISI'.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Yisro are provided below:

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