YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***Bein Adam Le-chavero:* Ethics of Interpersonal Conduct**

**By Rav Binyamin Zimmerman**

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[www.vbm-torah.org/archive/chavero3/02chavero.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/chavero3/02chavero.htm)

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This week’s *shiurim* are dedicated by Mr Joseph Eisenman

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**Shiur #02:**

**The Order of *Kedoshim* and the Connection between Shabbat and Parents**

**The Recipe for Holiness**

As mentioned in the introduction to this series, we will begin our discussion by analyzing the various interpersonal *mitzvot* contained in the nineteenth chapter of *Vayikra,* the recipe for fulfilling the mandate in its heading (v. 2): “You shall be holy (*kedoshim tihyu*), for holy am I, Lord your God.” In order to gain a deeper appreciation of the process, we will look at the general structure of the chapter and how these *mitzvot* of *kedusha* (holiness) fit into it.

It truth, all *mitzvot* have inherent holiness and sanctify their performer, as the text of the standard blessing for *mitzvot* indicates:

The source of all blessing is You, God… Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to…

However, this chapter is uniquely direct. It begins with verses guiding the Jewish people to follow in the footsteps of God by being holy. This general commandment is followed by a potpourri of *mitzvot*, unrelated to each other.

As pointed out in a wonderful article by Rav Reuven Taragin ([www.vbm-torah.org/parsha/30kedosh.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha/30kedosh.htm)), the chapter is comprised of two parallel units, each of which is made up of three sections. Both units begin with *mitzvot bein adam la-Makom* (between man and God) and conclude with *mitzvot bein adam le-chavero* (between man and his fellow), followed by a general reference to the observance of *chukkim,* decrees. In between the sections is a part that discusses both kinds of *mitzvot*, which serves as a bridge between the other two sections.

The following parallel sections make up the framework of Chapter 19:

1. Verses 3-10 and verses 23-31 speak primarily of *mitzvot bein adam la-Makom*.
2. Verses 11-14 and 32 act as transitions to the two sections dealing with *bein adam le-chavero* (verses 15-22 and verses 33-37).

In order to appreciate the parallelism, it is necessary to look at all the verses in depth, but even without doing so, the juxtaposition of interpersonal and ritual obligations in the context of holiness makes it very clear that both these elements are necessary for achieving *kedusha*. But why are these specific *mitzvot* mentioned as part of the recipe for holiness? Were they just chosen as examples of interpersonal and ritual obligations, or is adherence to these particular *mitzvot* a path to holiness? Our analysis of these *mitzvot* throughout the series will deal with this question.

In fact, another instance wherein we see the bridging of the ritual and the interpersonal obligations of man is the Ten Commandments. Rav Levi in the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 24:5) explains that the *mitzvot* found in *Parashat* *Kedoshim* resemble the *mitzvot* recorded in the Ten Commandments:

Rav Chiya taught: “This passage was spoken in congregation, because the majority of the elements of the Torah are dependent on it.” R. Levi said: “Because the Ten Commandments are included in it.”

Both of these statements stress the importance of this chapter, and we will see how this is revealed in the text.

**The Division within the Chapter**

Understanding this concept of holiness requires careful examination of the chapter. One element which is repeated throughout the chapter is the Tetragrammaton, which appears again and again after numerous *mitzvot* in the chapter.

In fact, as noted in the article above, the sections of the chapter are not only parallel in general content but in the name of God used in the different sections as well. In the first sections dealing with *mitzvot* *bein adam la-Makom* every phrase concludes with the phrase "I am God" or "I am Lord your God." In the transitional sections the conclusion is "your God, I am Lord." In the section dealing with interpersonal *mitzvot*, the conclusion "your fellow, I am God" appears.

The repeated mention of the name of God after the various *mitzvot* in this chapter is noted by Rav S.R. Hirsch as well, who views the various references to God in the chapter as a means of creating a backdrop for the different aspects of holiness. The verses that end with "I am Lord your God" (2, 3, 4, 10, 25, 31, 34, 36) divide the chapter into distinct groups and the verses that conclude with the phrase: "I am God" (12, 14, 16, 18, 28, 30, 32, 37) subdivides these groups into different paragraphs.

Rav David Tzvi Hoffman also notes the division into fifteen paragraphs, each ending in "I am Lord your God" or "I am God" and attempts to explain its significance. (See Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in the Weekly Parasha*, p. 273.)

Without getting into the nitty-gritty, suffice it to say that the Torah is laying down groups of principles which will help one foster a deeper connection to our God and allow one to adequately fulfill the directive that opens this fundamental chapter:

Speak to the entire assembly of the Israelites and say to them, “You shall be holy, for holy am I, Lord your God.”

**The Specifics of Section One**

With this in mind, we will first devote our attention to the first section of *mitzvot* detailed in the chapter in order to see what lessons in interpersonal holiness we can glean from it. Rav Hirsch notes that the *mitzvot* that appear through verse 10 conclude with the name of God three times, dividing the introduction into three pillars of holiness, as he writes (*ad loc.):*

The pillars of our sanctification consist of three basic principles: parents and the Sabbath (v. 3), the purity of our conception of God (v. 4) and the purity and social productivity of our relationship with God (vv. 5-10)

This first section pillar of holiness is rather surprising. These concepts are familiar but seemingly unrelated.

Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my sabbaths; I am Lord your God. (v. 3)

What could be the connection between these two *mitzvot*, and why are parents and Sabbath a principle of holiness at all?

In truth, as mentioned above, there is a parallel between the *mitzvot* recorded here regarding holiness and those which form the Ten Commandments. The Rashbam (*ad loc.*) notes that the connection between the way one interacts with his parents and the way one should observe Shabbat is already mentioned in the Ten Commandments. There too, we have remembering Shabbat as the fourth commandment and honoring one's parents as the fifth commandment. The fact that they are grouped together in these two places indicates that there is a deep connection between them. But what could that be?

Furthermore, the reiteration of these concepts in the context of holiness serves to add another element. As noted above, v. 3 parallels a later line, v. 30: “You shall keep my Sabbaths and revere my sanctuary; I am God.” In verse 3, the commands to revere and to keep are mentioned regarding one's parents and the Sabbath respectively, and in verse 30 regarding the sanctuary and the Sabbath. The lesson seems clear: while the Ten Commandments introduce the Jewish people to the concepts of remembering Shabbat and honoring one's parents, the directive of *kedusha* requires adding the elements of observance and reverence. It is these elements that evidently define the heightened relationship with God that *kedusha* demands, and it is this that must be explained.

The Ramban speaks of the added element of reverence here, but the Yere’im (Ch. 410) underscores it more clearly: just as the Torah connects observing the Sabbath with reverence for the Temple and reverence for one’s parents, it teaches that the idea of reverence applies to Shabbat as well. One must not only safeguard Shabbat, but revere it as well. The Yere'im defines this mitzva to mean that "a person should reflect (on how) to honor and observe, and to be afraid of it." (See Mori, Rav Binyamin Tabory's fascinating article on the subject: <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/mitzva/29mitzva.htm>.)

The understanding of the Yere'im highlights the fact that our chapter of *kedusha* specifically adds an element of reverence, to three things we already know to be significant: Shabbat, parents and the Temple. Why is reverence so significant for holiness?

**The Juxtaposition of Shabbat and Parents**

Let us take a moment to discuss the connection between respect for one’s parents and the Sabbath.

The placing of reverence for one's parents next to keeping Shabbat and the mention of reverence for the sanctuary alongside keeping Shabbat have halakhic implications. The Sages derive from these juxtapositions that one must observe Shabbat even if his parents ask him to desecrate it and that it is forbidden to build the Temple on Shabbat.

Thus, the Midrash (*Sifra, ad loc.*) writes:

Alternatively, “Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father” — one might think that if his father or mother tells him to transgress one of the commandments stated in the Torah, he should listen to them. Therefore, the Torah says, “And you shall keep my sabbaths” — you are all obligated to honor Me…

One might think that building the Temple would supersede the Sabbath; therefore, the Torah says, “You shall keep my Sabbaths and revere my sanctuary.”

The Sages explain that although parents are accorded extra special treatment, their heightened position is still surpassed by that of God, whose final word surpasses that of any human, including parents.

Yet, while this lesson is important, logically any mitzva could have been used to teach this lesson. What is the connection between Shabbat and God's will being paramount over the will of one's parents?

**The Connection between Shabbat and Parents**

Rav Hirsch (*ad loc.*) explains how these *mitzvot* educate one to fulfill the mission statement of being holy.

Revering one’s mother and father and sanctifying the Sabbath educate the Jew to the holiness of life, from the day he is born to the day he dies. This reverence for parents is the first step toward sanctity…

Parents convey to their children not only physical existence, but also the Jewish mission. They transmit to the next generation Jewish history and the Torah’s God-given status. Hence, it is not the good that parents do for their children, but the mission given to the parents concerning their children, which is the basis of the mitzva of honoring parents. He who honors his father and his mother honors God and His revelation in history and in the Torah.

Rav Hirsch continues that this chapter of *kedusha* teaches the child to subordinate his will in order to train himself towards self-control, as one of the most important elements of holiness is the ability to restrict one's urges and desires in order to achieve a higher calling.

The Alshikh here begins his commentary by explaining the need to connect the directive of being holy with revering one's parents:

This is God’s message to man: I commanded you to become holy in order to secure eternal life in the World to Come. However, before you focus yourself on a life of holiness in order to achieve eternity, realize that your father and mother brought you into life in this world. Though it may be temporary, it is this life that gives you the ability to merit eternity. Therefore, do not be ungrateful; revere your biological parents.

The Alshikh continues by explaining that the connection between these two *mitzvot* emanates from the very nature of the beginning of each life, as *Kiddushin* 30b states: “There are three partners in a person: God, his father and his mother.”

The Torah selects Sabbath observance as the example to demonstrate that obedience to God has overriding priority because the parents, having contributed two thirds to the creation of the human being, might claim that they are entitled to a greater share of their children's obedience than God. One answer why this is a spurious claim is that even the parents’ contribution to the child's life, i.e. the physical part, consists of material originally created by God. He, having created the first human, is essentially the creator of all three parts of man. Now, God does not need a partner for anything; rather, He graciously allows the parents to join Him.

The Alshikh adds:

Since the Shabbat is the symbol of God having created the universe out of nothing, the Torah, by mentioning Shabbat observance immediately after the commandment to revere one's parents, provides the rationale for why God's commandments supersede any demands parents may make on their children. The Torah is reminding us here that both we and our parents are duty-bound to recognize his primacy.

As explained in *Parashat Bereishit*, the relationship of the Shabbat to the universe is like the relationship of the soul to the body. A physical universe could not exist, could not endure, without the spiritual infusion called Shabbat. Similarly, the two thirds of a person contributed by one's parents would be meaningless without the last third contributed by God, namely the soul, the spiritual essence of man.

The Keli Yakar takes a similar tack. He explains that respect for one’s parents is the expression of gratitude towards those who bring one into the world, and Shabbat reminds us that the world and everything in it have been created by God, Who is therefore our parent as well (and it is for that reason that in the event of a clash, His will takes precedence over honoring one’s parents).

In *Along the Maggid’s Journey*, pp. 65-66, Rabbi Paysach Krohn records a beautiful story about Rav Moshe Feinstein which echoes this idea. Reb Moshe was once approached by a noted mathematician whose son wished to continue learning Torah after his high school education instead of immediately embarking on a career path.

The father said: “I am a mathematician, and I would like my son to enter the same field. I know that you would prefer that he continue his Torah studies, but the rabbis teach: ‘There are three partners in a person: God, his father and his mother.’ You represent God’s point of view: that my son should remain with his Torah studies, but my wife and I don’t feel that way. We want him to go to college, and we are a majority of two-to-one. Doesn’t the Torah say (*Shemot* 23:2), ‘Follow the majority’?”

Reb Moshe's response was fascinating, as he smiled at the father and said, “Your arithmetic is incorrect. Let us think of the partnership in your son as nine shares. God has three-ninths, and you and your wife have three-ninths each. But God is a part of each of you as well, so you can speak for only two-thirds of your own self; the other third belongs to God.

“Therefore,” explained Reb Moshe, “three-ninths of your son, which is God’s share, votes for him to remain in learning. One-third of both you and your wife – the part which is God’s – also want him to learn. If you add it all together, you have five-ninths in favor and only four-ninths against. Thus, the majority rules, and he should continue in yeshiva.”

**The General Lesson**

The Alshikh also understands this point as leading to the next line in this chapter:

Now, one might argue that since the Torah commands us to respect and obey our parents in spite of the limited role they have in our existence, we should also respect and revere other agents of God, e.g. forces of nature such as the sun, etc. Therefore the Torah warns us in the next verse: "Do not turn to idols" — you must not have any reverence or even regard for other so-called deities, because "I am Lord your God," exclusively.

Rav Hirsch explains that the mention of Shabbat here reminds us that "Parents have been appointed to be emissaries of God's will, and for this purpose alone has authority been invested in their will. Naturally, then, the parents' will must retreat before God's will." Furthermore, he explains, there is a pedagogical point:

Shabbat serves as an example; when a child sees his parents observing Shabbat, he learns to make obedience to God preeminent.

Rav Hirsch also notes another distinction between the formulation of the Ten Commandments and that of our chapter: Shabbat and respect for one's parents are referred to in the former in the singular, while here the verse mandates reverence for parents and keeping Shabbat in the plural. He explains:

It is not only individuals who must fulfill these two fundamentals of Jewish morality; rather, they are to leave their imprint on the whole Jewish national character. Because of them, God becomes our God; through them, our homage to God is made manifest. They are two pillars of the holiness of Jewish life. As long as these pillars are in place, there is a basis for our very relationship to God, and God says of us: "I am Lord your God." Experience too teaches us that when one of these pillars falls, the other falls also.

Based on this analysis, it would seem that the Torah is teaching the Jewish people that while holiness requires the proper treatment of one’s fellow man, the failure to realize that God is the source of mankind and that His directives are preeminent is a falsification of the concept of true sanctity.

God created the Shabbat, which is not only a holy day which attests to Divine creation, but a reminder that the entire world has purpose, as man was placed in a world that was "very good" (*Bereishit* 1:31). God could therefore “rest,” while giving man the mission of living by the ideal of holiness not just one day a week, but at all times and in all endeavors.

The perfection of the Divine creation may sometimes be hard to comprehend, but these twin *mitzvot* help us realize it. Treating one’s parents, God's partners in creation, properly and observing the weekly reminder of Shabbat are meant to serve as the cornerstones of one's recognition that God lies behind his own birth and that the world was created for a purpose. Remembering that God's will and His commandments take precedence opens the door for a life of holiness, as described in the rest of the chapter.

In next week's lesson, we will start analyzing interpersonal holiness one mitzva at a time, beginning with the sacred mandate of revering one’s parents.