**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

PARASHAT KEDOSHIM

SICHA OF HARAV MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN

“You Shall Be Holy”

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*Mitzvot* of holiness

In *parashat Kedoshim*, the Torah sets down a number of forms of behavior, all of which are meant to guide us as God’s people – as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” a people that conducts itself with holiness. Even without delving into in-depth analysis of what holiness means, it is easy to understand the connection between this concept and the first few commandments in the *parasha*:

“You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

You shall fear every man his mother and his father, and keep My *shabbatot*; I am the Lord your God.

Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molten golds; I am the Lord your God.

And if you offer a sacrifice of peace offering to the Lord, you shall offer it so that it may be favorably accepted. It shall be eaten the same day of offer it, and on the morrow, and if anything remains until the third day, it shall be burned in fire. And if it is eaten at all of the third day, it is abominable; it shall not be accepted. Therefore everyone that eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned the hallowed thing of the Lord.” (*Vayikra* 19:2-8)

The commandment of Shabbat expresses the idea of sanctity of time. The avoidance of idolatry is also connected to holiness, as is the command to fear one’s father and mother, who are earthly representatives of God, as it were, during the early stages of a child’s development. Likewise, the sacrificial offerings are deeply embedded in the world of holiness.

A life of holiness

However, the continuation of the text presents laws whose connection to holiness is less clear:

“And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleaning of your harvest.

And you shall not glean your vineyard, neither shall you gather the single grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger; I am the Lord your God.

You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, neither lie to one another.” (vv. 9-11)

What are these social laws doing in the middle of a collection of laws about sanctity? Is the prohibition against stealing based on our being a nation that is holy unto God?

We might offer two answers. The first and simpler answer pertains to the understanding that God is present in our lives. The conventional explanation of the difference between stealing (*geneva*) and robbery (*gezel*) is that a robber is brazen and unafraid. He fears neither God nor any person. A thief, on the other hand, is hypocritical: he slips in in the middle of the night, avoiding detection, but forgets one important detail: “He Who formed the eye – shall He not see?” (*Tehillim* 94:9). God’s eye is surely watching, at all times.

A life of holiness helps us to avoid this hypocrisy or blindness. A Jew is meant to live his life with full awareness of God’s Presence in his world. He will not stoop to theft; he will not even contemplate it. He is engaged in a life of holiness, taking refuge under God’s wings.

From holiness to kindness

A different answer arises from the introduction of the *Meshekh Chokhma* to our *parasha*:

“‘You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy’ – this is to say, If you make yourselves holy, then I will consider you as having sanctified Me (*Torat Kohanim, Kedoshim*, 1:1). For the blessed Creator, in and of Himself, has no end and no limit; He has no need for any completion other than Himself; He is complete before the world comes into existence just as He is after it exists. Only out of the Creator’s great kindness did He produce upper worlds and unfathomable spheres without number, all of which speak His praise and glory, and they perceive their Creator.

There is one point in the spheres, of coarse and thick matter, the smallest of all the spheres, with thousands of creatures. He created there one creature, small and weak in temperament, approximately three *amot* tall, a vessel filled with excrement whose mouth is filled with saliva, who wanders recklessly without knowledge of his creator and leader. The perception of God is not natural for him, and therefore he is not compelled but possesses free will.

He includes many contradictory traits: injustice and justice, evil and good, intelligence and foolishness, indecency and appropriateness, indolence and alacrity, and other similar traits in the unnumbered thousands.

In short, he is composed of all the natural powers which exist in the world, and he is in actuality a miniature world. And all those powers are latent, and he has the ability to arouse them with the spirit of fire, and develop each power infinitely, as we find certain people who expanded their powers infinitely, either for good or evil, such as Chizkiyahu and Menashe.” (*Meshekh Chokhma*, *Vayikra* 19:2)

The *Meshekh Chokhma* goes on to elaborate at length in describing God’s kindness in planting us upon His land. We are not here by right. God owes us nothing. A profound and genuine understanding and internalization of this fact will lead naturally to the generosity described in the *parasha*.

A person who understands that his entire world – his assets, his intellectual property, his abilities – are all a gift from God, will not find it difficult to share them with others. From the outset he knows that they are not ‘his’; all that he has is a free gift from God. It is therefore only logical to ‘pay it forward.’ And especially so if the Giver of the gifts Himself asks that the good that He bestows be forwarded to others.

**You shall love Him as yourself**

There are some verses that appear twice in our *parasha*. One of them appears near the beginning:

“You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; you shall not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.” (*Vayikra* 19:15)

Later on in the *parasha* we find:

“You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in length, in weight, or in measure” (v. 35).

Why does the same command appear twice? To answer this question, let us go back to the two verses preceding the second iteration of this command:

“And if a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. But the stranger that dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.” (vv. 33-34)

This law pertains to the ‘stranger’ (*ger*). Does the Torah refer here to a proselyte (*ger tzedek*), or to a non-Jewish resident of the land (*ger toshav*)? Although the answer one way or the other has halakhic ramifications, the message of the verse is the same either way: we must accept the ‘*ger’* and treat him “as one born among you.” The prohibition against wronging someone in judgment applies in the case of a *ger* just as it does in the case of a Jew, and therefore the Torah emphasizes the prohibition once again, so as to include the former.

Obviously, it is far easier to wrong a *ger.* He is less familiar with the law, with the language, and with the local custom. And this is precisely the situation that the Torah addresses.

In recent years, the State of Israel has taken in a great number of refugees from different countries: Eritrea, Sudan, and others. Two questions arise with regard to these refugees.

The first concerns the possibility of their entering Israel, and, accordingly, the possibility of removing them from the country. In this regard it would seem that it is altogether legitimate to limit their entry. They cause significant economic damage, increase the crime rate, and may present a demographic threat. Here we must exercise caution and concern for our fate as a Jewish state.

The other question concerns our attitude towards these refugees so long as they are in Israel. And this is the intention of the Torah’s command. We must do all that we can to allow these refugees proper social conditions, welfare services, etc.

My father-in-law, of blessed memory, employed a foreign worker as a health aide over a long period. When my father-in-law passed away, I wanted to help this worker receive what he was entitled to by law. I was filled with pride and joy to be a citizen of the State of Israel when I saw how the system was set up to provide him with his rights. Incidentally, that foreign worker was already entitled to a pension from the State of Israel, but he chose to devote a few more years to the IDF.

**Make your Torah Permanent**

All of the above flows from the same source we mentioned at the outset: a life of sanctity, a life lived before God. This is another way of expressing the Rambam’s exhortation to “make your Torah permanent and your occupation transient” (*Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 3:7).

So long as we are in yeshiva, the scope of our activity is limited. I was very happy to read the sentiments expressed by Ari Reich in his article, “Letting the Baby Cry,” and I identify with them completely:

“Along with the baby’s cry, we also detect another moral imperative that emerges from the beit midrash of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: ‘Torah – what shall become of it?’ If we go out into the field every time we hear the cry of a baby, we will never come back from the field, and we will thereby condemn the Torah, heaven forfend, to perpetual neglect on the bookshelf.” (*Daf Kesher* 1342)

So long as we are in the *beit midrash*, our efforts are focused on Torah study. It is certainly possible and praiseworthy to engage in some volunteer activity at the same time, but our thoughts and energies are directed mainly towards our engagement in Torah. Afterwards, however, we will be living a whole life of action, in all spheres.

**“You shall be holy”**

Our *parasha* sets forth a number of commandments that are focused on giving to the weak. This applies on different levels: there is giving to someone who is poor in monetary terms, poor in spirituality, poor in Torah learning, or poor in family. All these needy people, and others, are worthy recipients of our efforts and our giving.

After we invest some years in intensive Torah study, we go out into the wider world. Everyone chooses the sphere in which he wants to be active: education, law, medicine, whatever. No matter what direction we choose, our moral obligation is to channel our abilities and talents in such a way as to benefit society. An accountant can try to help charity organizations with their budget planning; a doctor helps the sick; and so on. Every occupation offers some opportunity for a mission and for giving.

This is not volunteering; this is a life’s mission. Within the framework of making a living, we find our purpose in the world. This giving, from a professional and mature place within ourselves, which is able to weigh up the relevant considerations and possibilities, is far more meaningful than what a volunteer can give during his time in yeshiva.

I do not mean to denigrate giving in any form or framework. However, we have to be able to build up our personality, our emotional and intellectual capabilities, in order to make them more effective, for the sake of future giving.

All of this leads to a constant presence of God in our everyday lives. Much emphasis is placed on the importance of “fixing times for Torah” once we are no longer in a yeshiva framework. Similarly, it is important to set times for volunteering during our yeshiva studies. A symbolic act, setting aside a certain time, reflects the inner aspiration that motivates a healthy student of Torah: “You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.”