**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT ACHAREI MOT – KEDOSHIM**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

Parashat Kedoshim begins with the famous command, “*Kedoshim tiheyu*” – “You shall be sacred” (19:2), which is followed by the pronouncement, “for I, the Lord your God, am sacred.”

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 24:9) comments that this addition – “for I…am sacred” – is necessary to preclude the mistaken notion that the command to “be sacred” means that we must aspire to be sacred “*kamoni*” – “like Me,” like the Almighty Himself. God followed this command by emphasizing, “I, the Lord your God, am sacred” – that His sanctity is far beyond anything we could possibly aspire to, and thus the requirement of “*kedoshim tiheyu*” must not be misunderstood to mean that we are to strive to be sacred like God. Many writers raised the question of why we might have mistakenly assumed that the command of “*kedoshim tiheyu*” would demand endeavoring to be sacred like God.

Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro, in *Ma’or Va’shemesh*, suggests that the Midrash here perhaps refers to withdrawal, living separate and apart from other people like the Almighty. As many have noted, the term *kadosh* (“sacred’) often connotes separation. Rashi, commenting to this verse, explains that the command “*kedoshim tiheyu*” refers to abstention from forbidden sexual relationships, whereas the Ramban famously interprets “*kedoshim tiheyu*” as a more general command requiring moderation in our indulgence in physical enjoyment. Either way, “*kedoshim tiheyu*” requires a certain degree of withdrawal to facilitate spiritual focus. As such, the *Ma’or Va-shemesh* writes, one might have concluded that this command similarly requires withdrawal from people, that one isolate himself so as to avoid the distractions and lures that socialization could present. Just as God is, by definition, separate and withdrawn from the world, one might have concluded that people, too, must isolate themselves as part of the effort to achieve sanctity. The Midrash therefore instructs that this is not the case. Unlike God, we must be engaged with other people in order to develop *kedusha*. We are to aspire to holiness not by isolating ourselves from people, but to the contrary, by interacting with and learning from them. Appropriate social interaction does not compromise our *kedusha*, but enhances it.

The *Ma’or Va-shemesh* adds that this is why Rashi emphasizes in his opening remarks to this verse that the series of commands contained in this section were presented “*be-hak’hel*” – at an assembly of the entire nation. God wanted Moshe to emphasize to the people that the ideal of “*kedoshim tiheyu*” is achieved not in solitude, by isolating oneself, but rather specifically “*be-hak’hel*,” by joining together with other people, working with them, assisting them, receiving assistance from them, influencing them and being influenced by them.

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Acharei-Mot outlines the special service which the *kohein gadol* would perform each year in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on Yom Kippur, to earn atonement on the nation’s behalf. This marked the only occasion when a human being was permitted to enter *kodesh ha-kodashim* (the innermost sanctum of the Temple), as the *kohein gadol* would enter the chamber to offer incense and then sprinkle blood from the special atonement sacrifices offered on that day.

The Torah commands (16:17) that when the *kohein gadol* enters the *kodesh ha-kodashim* on Yom Kippur, no person is allowed to be present inside the Temple. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 5:2), interestingly enough, comments that even angels were not permitted to be in the *Mikdash* at that time. The Yerushalmi thus questions on this basis the testimony of Shimon Ha-tzadik, who served as *kohein gadol* in the Second Temple for many years, that an angel-like being accompanied him each year when he entered the *kodesh ha-kodashim* on Yom Kippur.

What might be the meaning of this concept – that angels were not permitted in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* as the *kohein gadol* entered the innermost sanctum on Yom Kippur?

Rav Yissakhar Dov of Belz suggested that the Yerushalmi was emphasizing that angels could not be present in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* at this time because only a human being is capable of beseeching God for atonement on the people’s behalf. The *kohein gadol*, himself a flawed human being, and someone who, like all people, had endured the rigors and challenges of life, was qualified to stand before God representing the nation as they stood in judgment, and plead that they be forgiven. Angelic beings, who are free from human vices and from the complexities of this world, are in no position to defend us before the Heavenly Tribunal. And therefore, as the *kohein gadol* enters the *kodesh ha-kodashim* to ask God to forgive His nation, no angels are permitted to join him.

The *kohein gadol*’s entry into the inner chamber on Yom Kippur marked the moment of greatest sanctity, when a human being experienced the closest possible encounter with God. Rav Yissakhar Dov of Belz teaches that at this holy moment, the *kohein gadol* was the one best equipped to advocate on behalf of the nation’s sinners. Spiritual greatness should lead us to be ever more sensitive towards, and understanding of, other people’s faults and mistakes. Intuitively, we might have assumed that when a person reaches the “*kodesh ha-kodashim*,” attaining especially high spiritual levels, he naturally becomes less sympathetic to other people’s failings. In truth, however, to the contrary, spiritual achievement should increase a person’s love, concern and respect for all his fellow Jews, including those who have not achieved what he has. It should lead him to empathize with their struggles rather than condemn their wrongful behavior. Strengthening our relationship with God must result in a stronger bond with other people, and a stronger desire to defend them and advocate on their behalf.

Monday

The Torah in Parashat Acharei-Mot (17:13) introduces the *mitzva* of *kisui ha-dam*, which requires covering with earth the blood of a bird or a *chaya* (non-domesticated animal) after slaughtering. The Rama (Y.D. 28:1), based on the *Orchot Chayim* – cited by the *Beit Yosef* – rules that although the Torah requires covering the blood after slaughtering, this obligation has no bearing on the validity of the slaughtering. That is to say, if, for whatever reason, the blood of a bird or a *chaya* was not covered, the meat is nevertheless permissible for consumption, as the slaughtering itself was performed properly. The *Beit Yosef* writes that the *Orchot Chayim* drew proof to this position from the Gemara, though he does not specify where in the Gemara this proof appears.

Rav Yom Tov Lipman Heller (author of the *Tosfot Yom Tov* commentary to the Mishna), in his *Divrei Chamudot* commentary to the Rosh (Chulin 6:1), suggests that the proof is found in the Gemara’s discussion of *kisui ha-dam* in contrast to another *mitzva* performed with earth. In Masekhet Chulin (88b), the Gemara comments that Avraham was rewarded for humbly saying about himself, “I am but earth and ashes” (Bereishit 18:27) by his descendants receiving two *mitzvot* performed with earth and ash. The ash of the *para aduma* (red heifer) is used for purification, and the earth of the ground of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* plays a crucial role in the procedure performed for a *sota* (suspected adulteress). The Gemara questions why the *mitzva* of *kisui ha-dam* – which also involves the earth – was not mentioned as one of the *mitzvot* given to Avraham’s descendants as a reward, and the Gemara answers that “*hana’a leika*” – one receives no benefit from *kisui ha-dam*. Although this is a *mitzva* which must be fulfilled, it does not provide any actual benefit other than its being a *mitzva*, and thus it was not mentioned as a reward to Avraham. The *Divrei Chamudot* comments that if covering the blood was necessary to validate the slaughtering, then the Gemara could not have made such a comment. After all, the *mitzva* of *kisui ha-dam* would then provide a very important and valuable benefit – enabling us to eat fowl and non-domesticated animals. Necessarily, then, the Gemara assumed that covering the blood, though obligatory, is not needed to render the meat permissible for consumption, thus providing Talmudic proof to the *Orchot Chayim*’s ruling.

Rav Shlomo Eiger, in his *Gilyon Maharsha* to the *Shulchan Arukh*, refutes this proof. He notes that if the Torah had not commanded the *mitzva* of *kisui ha-dam*, then the meat of birds and *chayot* would, quite obviously, have been permissible for consumption without any need to cover the blood. Hence, the Gemara’s comment could be understood even if the *mitzva* indeed affects the permissibility of the meat, in that this *mitzva* would then be adding a further requirement to make such meat permissible for consumption, and it thus does not provide any benefit. This is in contrast to the other two *mitzvot* mentioned by the Gemara – the ashes of the *para aduma* and the procedure for a *sota* – which both serve to solve a halakhic dilemma: the *para aduma*’s ashes allow for the purification of people and utensils that had become impure, and the procedure for the *sota* serves to prove the woman’s innocence in order to preserve her marriage. *Kisui ha-dam*, by contrast, if it were necessary for the meat to be permissible, would be making the process of producing meat more demanding, rather than resolving a problem. As such, it provides no benefit.

Rav Shlomo Eiger therefore points to a different Talmudic source – the Gemara’s discussion earlier (Chulin 84b) regarding the case of a dangerously ill patient who required meat on Shabbat for health reasons, and a bird or *chaya* was slaughtered on Shabbat for this purpose. Although slaughtering is forbidden on Shabbat, it is allowed when necessary to avoid a possible risk to the life. In such a case, the Gemara concludes, the blood is not covered after slaughtering, because digging is forbidden on Shabbat. (Different views exist as to whether one should cover the blood in such a case if he has loose earth already available – *Shulchan Arukh*, Y.D. 28:16.) Rav Shlomo Eiger notes that if covering the blood were necessary for the meat to be permissible for consumption, then seemingly, there should be no reason not to cover the blood on Shabbat. After all, just as the prohibition against *shechita* (slaughtering) is suspended in order to enable the patient to eat, the prohibition against eating without covering the blood would similarly be suspended to enable the patient to eat. Necessarily, then, there is no prohibition against eating without covering the blood.

One might have countered that perhaps there is, indeed, such a prohibition, but nevertheless we allow the ill patient to eat the meat without covering the blood because this is preferable to committing an additional act of Shabbat desecration. Faced with the decision as to whether to violate Shabbat a second time by producing earth for *kisui ha-dam*, or to allow the gravely ill patient to eat without the blood being covered, one could argue that the latter is preferable, given the unique severity of Shabbat desecration. However, Rav Shlomo Eiger notes the accepted ruling (*Shulchan Arukh*, O.C. 328:14) that when a dangerously ill patient requires meat on Shabbat, an animal is slaughtered for him even if non-kosher meat is readily available. Several different reasons have been offered for this *halakha* (see *Mishna Berura* 328:39), among them the explanation cited by the *Beit Yosef* from the Ran, that slaughtering on Shabbat is a single forbidden act, whereas eating forbidden meat transgresses a Torah violation with the consumption of each *ke-zayit* (the volume of an olive). By the same token, Rav Shlomo Eiger writes, were it to be forbidden to eat meat when *kisui ha-dam* was not performed, *Halakha* would require digging earth to cover the blood after slaughtering on Shabbat to feed a gravely ill patient. The fact that this is not allowed proves that the failure to perform *kisui ha-dam* does not affect the status of the meat.

Tuesday

Parashat Kedoshim begins with the famous but vague command of “*kedoshim tiheyu*” – “you shall be sacred.” Numerous different interpretations have been offered to explain this command, and, additionally, to explain how God could instruct Moshe, as He does, to relay this command to “the entire congregation of the Israelites.” The Torah emphasizes that specifically the imperative of “*kedoshim tiheyu*,” which appears to set an especially high bar of conduct, is issued to the entire nation, to the exclusion of nobody. The commentators thus set out to explain this command in a manner which makes it realistically attainable by each and every member of *Am Yisrael*.

One particularly intriguing approach is that offered by Rav Mordekhai Yosef Leiner of Izhbitz, in his *Mei Ha-shiloach*. He suggests that the verb *k.d.sh.* In this context does not actually mean “sacred,” but rather “ready” or “prepared.” An example of this usage of the verb is God’s command to Moshe before the Revelation at Sinai, “*ve-****kidashtam***” (Shemot 19:10), which likely means, “you shall prepare them.” We read several verses later (19:14) that Moshe fulfilled this command – “***va-yekadeish*** *et ha-am*,” and the Torah explains that Moshe said to the people, “**be prepared** for three days from now” (19:15), indicating that this is what “*ve-kidashtam*” meant. Similarly, in several contexts (e.g. Bereishit 38:21), the Torah refers to a prostitute with the term “*kedeisha*,” likely because she makes herself ready and available for all men.

Accordingly, the *Mei Ha-shiloach* explains that the command “*kedoshim tiheyu*” requires us not to be “sacred,” but rather to be ready and prepared at all times, always anticipating the time when God will provide us with insight and inspiration. In other words, it demands that we be ready to seize every opportunity we are given to increase our knowledge and improve ourselves. The *Mei Ha-shiloach* explains on this basis the continuation of the verse: “for I, the Lord your God, am ‘sacred’.” God tells us that just as He is always ready and available to help us when we require assistance, so must we be always ready and available for Him.

This interpretation of “*kedoshim tiheyu*” neatly explains how this command can be issued to all members of the nation, how it can be fulfilled and achieved to its fullest by each and every one of us. According to the *Mei Ha-shiloach*, the requirement of “*kedoshim tiheyu*” essentially requires us to try to achieve *kedusha*, to seize the opportunities that come our way. It does not demand anything loftier than we are capable of doing or of being, but simply that we make it our priority to expand our knowledge and build our religious characters. This understanding of “*kedoshim tiheyu*” acknowledges that we are not presently able to rise to the great spiritual heights that we would ideally want, and requires simply that we take whatever steps we can in the direction of those heights once these steps become possible. Our obligation is to accept our current limitations while committing ourselves to seize every opportunity we are given to extend beyond them and make ourselves better.

Wednesday

The *mitzva* of *kisui ha-dam*, which the Torah introduces in Parashat Acharei-Mot (17:13), requires covering the blood of a bird or a *chaya* (non-domesticated animal) after it is slaughtered. The *Midrash Tanchuma* (Bereishit, 10) traces the roots of this *mitzva* back to the tragic story of Kayin and Hevel. After Kayin murdered his brother, the Midrash tells, he did not know what to do with the corpse. God sent to Kayin two birds, one of which killed the other and then proceeded to dig a grave and bury the carcass. Kayin thus learned what should be done with a lifeless corpse, and he then buried Hevel’s remains. “Therefore,” the Midrash concludes, “birds earned to have their blood covered.” The *mitzva* of *kisui ha-dam*, the Midrash comments, serves as a reward, as it were, to the bird which taught Kayin how to properly care for his murdered brother’s remains. (Of course, this does not explain why non-domesticated animals are also included in this obligation.)

The notion of *kisui ha-dam* as a type of “burial” appears in the Radbaz’s *Metuzdat David* (204), where he explains *kisui ha-dam* as a type of “burial” of the slaughtered creature. As the Torah states in presenting this command, “…for the soul of every flesh is its blood” (17:14), and therefore, although we are permitted to partake of the meat, we are required to “bury” the blood. The Radbaz proves this point from the requirement to place earth on the ground before slaughtering, and then to cover the blood with earth after slaughtering, such that the blood is surrounded by earth both on top and on the bottom (Chulin 83b). In this manner, the covering of the blood constitutes a “burial” of sorts.

What might be the significance of the Midrash’s depiction of Kayin being shown how to bury his slain brother? Why was the creature that taught Kayin the concept of burial deemed worthy of reward?

On the simplest level, of course, the Midrash is emphasizing the importance of burial, whereby the deceased’s dignity and honor is preserved. But additionally, there may be particular significance to the fact that the notion of burial was first taught to a murderer, who was shown how to care for his victim’s remains. We might have assumed that after Kayin committed such a heinous crime, nothing he did anymore mattered, and there would be no value to tending to Hevel’s body. Having taken Hevel’s life, nothing he did for Hevel could possibly have any meaning or significance. The Midrash here perhaps emphasizes that even after committing a grievous, sinful act, one should not simply despair, and assume there is no longer any value to his good deeds. The fact that the birds were rewarded for showing Kayin how to care for his brother’s remains demonstrates that even if one has failed, his actions still matter, and even his seemingly small good deeds have great significance. If so, then the Midrash here instructs that like the bird in this story, we should be willing and prepared to guide all people towards performing good deeds, regardless of their past. Even those who have made grave mistakes – as Kayin did – should be showed and taught how to act correctly, because every good deed matters and has great value, even after failure.

Thursday

The Torah in Parashat Kedoshim (19:18) introduces the prohibitions of “*lo tikom*” and “*lot titor*” – taking revenge, and bearing a grudge. As Rashi and the Rambam (*Hilkhot Dei’ot* 7:7-8) explain, *nekama* (revenge) is wronging one’s fellow to avenge a wrong, whereas *netira* (a grudge) means reminding the person of the wrong he committed, even without exacting revenge.

In concluding his discussion of these prohibitions, the Rambam writes that eliminating from one’s heart the memory of a wrong committed against him facilitates “the settlement of the earth and people’s dealings with one another.” Forgiving offenses, rather than preserving their memory and remaining resentful, provides the practical benefit of helping to ensure peaceful relations among people. Chizkuni similarly writes in this commentary to this verse in Parashat Kedoshim that through the observance of these commands, “*yavo shalom ba-olam*” – “peace shall come to the earth.”

If we focus solely on these remarks of the Rambam and Chizkuni, we might end up concluding that revenge and bearing grudges are wrong only as a practical matter, because they result in destructive conflicts. Fundamentally, avenging or resenting an offense one suffered is just and understandable, but for the sake of maintaining law and order in society, it is forbidden.

In truth, however, this is not the case. Both the Rambam and Chizkuni, as well as others, explain that revenge and grudges are not merely discouraged due to practical concerns, but also fundamentally misguided reactions to adversity, for various reasons.

The Rambam, in discussing revenge (7:7), writes that a person should forgive, rather than continue to resent, wrongs committed against him “for they are all, among those who understand, matters of vanity and nonsense, which are not worth avenging.” The vast majority of wrongs which people “suffer,” the Rambam writes, are, in the grand scheme of things, trivial. Instead of allowing ourselves to be overcome by anger, and carry a heavy load of emotional baggage with us into the future, we are best advised to put the matter into perspective, to avoid blowing the grievance out of proportion, which will allow us to forgive and forget.

Chizkuni writes in explaining these commands, “The Almighty said: Let the love you have for him triumph over the resentment you feel towards him.” According to Chizkuni, revenge and grudges are wrong because the offenses one commits against his fellow should not erase the feelings of love that should exist between them. Even if one has a legitimate grievance against someone, there is still ample reason for him to respect and love that person. The Torah’s command to avoid revenge and grudges does not, according to Chizkuni, undermine the validity of our grievances, but rather urges us not to allow our legitimate grievances to overshadow the many reasons we have to continue respecting and loving those who have wronged us.

*Sefer Ha-chinukh* (247) offers a theological explanation for these prohibitions, explaining that they flow naturally from our belief in Providence. Once we acknowledge that nothing happens to us without God having willed it, our response to being victimized will focus less – or not at all – on the perpetrator, and more on introspection and repentance. *Sefer Ha-chinukh* cites as an example of this concept King David’s reaction to the curses and insults hurled at him by Shimi ben Geira as he was escaping from his son, Avshalom, who mounted an armed rebellion against him. David told his men to allow Shimi ben Geira to continue “because the Lord told him: Curse David” (Shemuel II 16:10). David truly believed that this humiliation – like all trials and hardships people endure – was decreed by God, and therefore there was no sense in reacting angrily. *Sefer Ha-chinukh* urges us to respond in this manner to all wrongs committed against us, and direct our attention inward, to meaningful self-improvement, rather than react with destructive rage and the ultimately futile pursuit of revenge.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Kedoshim (19:9-10) introduces the command to leave certain portions of the produce that one grows for the poor. These portions are *pei’a* – the corner of the field; *leket* – sheaves of grain that fall during harvesting; *oleilot* – grapes in a vineyard that never form into a proper cluster; and *peret* – small grapes that do not develop properly. In Sefer Devarim (24:19), the Torah also adds the law of *shikhecha*, which requires leaving for the poor sheaves which had been forgotten during the harvest.

As a general rule, the owner of the field or vineyard is not permitted to distribute these portions to people in need. As opposed to other forms of charity, regarding which one has the freedom to choose particular individuals in need whom to help, these gifts must be left for the poor to come and take by themselves. The Mishna in Masekhet Pei’a (4:1) makes an exception in the case of a *dalit* – a hanging vine – and a palm tree. It would be too dangerous to allow the poor to climb to pick the fruits of these trees, and so the owner is responsible for harvesting the fruit and distributing it to the needy. Rabbi Shimon maintained that this applies also to almond trees.

*Torat Kohanim* infers this law from the word “*katzir*” (“harvest”) used by the Torah in this context. This term generally refers to the harvest of stalks of grain, which, in *Torat Kohanim*’s words, “*ha-katan moshel bo ka-gadol*” – are equally accessible to tall and short people. Stalks of grain, as opposed to fruit, are cut directly from the ground, and can thus be easily accessed by all, regardless of their height. Therefore, the command of “*ta’azov*” – that these portions must be left for the poor to come and take – does not apply to produce which cannot be equally accessed by people of all heights. The portions of such produce must be harvested by the orchard’s owner and distributed among the poor.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Pei’a 4:1) brings a different view, focusing on the word “*otam*” (“them”), which can be understood as imposing a limitation on the scope of the requirement of “*ta’azov*.” This opinion concluded that this word excludes produce which would be dangerous for the needy to access, and so the owner must distribute it to them.

Rav Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenberg, in his *Ha-ketav Ve-ha-kabbala*, notes that this *halakha* might also stem from the two different usages of the verb *a.z.v.* Normally, this term denotes “leaving” or “abandoning.” In some instances, however, it can be used to mean “help,” as in the command in Parashat Shemot (23:5), “*azov ta’azov imo*,” which requires assisting one’s friend unload the cargo from his animal. Rav Mecklenberg cites also a verse from Sefer Nechemya (3:8) which uses the word “*va-ya’azvu*” in reference to laborers who helped build the wall of Jerusalem. Accordingly, Rav Mecklenberg writes, the command “*ta’azov*” in the context of the mandatory gifts to the poor implies both that one must “leave” the required portions for the needy, and also that one must “assist” them by distributing to them those portions which would be dangerous for them to have to access themselves.

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