**S.A.L.T – PARASHAT KEDOSHIM**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

Parashat Kedoshim begins with famous command of “*kedoshim tiheyu*” – “you shall be sacred,” and then continues, “for I, the Lord your God, am sacred.” The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 24:9) explains this phrase as intended to dispel the possible misconception that we are bidden to be as sacred as He is. We might think that the command “*kedoshim tiheyu*” requires us to be as sacred as God Himself, and so God added, “for I…am sacred,” emphasizing that His sanctity will always exceed ours, and so we are not required to strive for His standard of sanctity.

Many writers noted the obvious question as to why anyone would have entertained such a notion, that the Torah demands that we be as sacred as God. Was there any doubt that God’s sanctity exceeds any level of sanctity that we could possibly aspire to?

Rav Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta, the *Oheiv Yisrael*, explains the Midrash’s comment by noting the Gemara’s teaching in Masekhet Berakhot (6a) that God wears *tefillin*. Whereas our *tefillin* contains parchment upon which is written verses that speak about God and our commitment to Him, God’s *tefillin* contain the verse, “And who is like Your nation, Israel, a singular nation on earth” (Divrei Hayamim I 17:21). The Rebbe of Apta explains that needless to say, God does not actually wear *tefillin*, but the Gemara speaks of God’s deep love and devotion to *Am Yisrael*. Just as we wear *tefillin* as a symbolic expression of our connection to God, how we wish to bind ourselves to Him and His will, similarly, God binds Himself, as it were, to His beloved nation.

The Rebbe of Apta suggests explaining the Midrash’s remark in a similar vein. One might have thought that we must strive for a level of “sanctity” – of devotion to God – that resembles His devotion to us. The misconception the Midrash seeks to dispel is that we are capable of committing ourselves to the Almighty to the same extent as He commits Himself to *Am Yisrael*. The Midrash teaches that this is impossible, because no human can be as devoted as God is devoted to His cherished nation. Limited as we are by our human constraints, we cannot possibly match His level of commitment to us.

According to the *Oheiv Yisrael*, then, the Midrash here seeks to teach us to recognize and appreciate the extent of God’s love for *Am Yisrael*, to recognize that His devotion to us exceeds any level of devotion that any human being is capable of achieving. We are to live with a deep sense of gratitude for, and trust in, God’s unbridled benevolence and kindness, acknowledging His deep love for His nation and His unconditional devotion to assisting us in overcoming whatever challenges we confront.

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Kedoshim (19:13) introduces the prohibition of “*osheik sekhar sakhir*” – withholding the wages owed to a worker. This prohibition is listed by the Rambam as one of the 365 Biblical prohibitions (*Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, *lo ta’aseh* 238).

Rav Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izhbitz, in his *Mei Ha-shiloach*, suggests that the concept underlying this prohibition extends beyond the specific context of a hired employee. He contends that just as it is forbidden to withhold wages owed to an employee, so it is forbidden in a broader sense to deny our fellow that which we are capable of providing for him or her. If we are in a position to extend assistance to another individual, but we unjustifiably refuse to do so, we are guilty of withholding “wages,” of failing to give our fellow that which he or she rightfully deserves. The *Mei Ha-shiloach* extends this concept even to prayer. If we refuse to pray on behalf of somebody in need of prayers, we are in breach of the broader principle underlying the prohibition of “*osheik sekhar sakhir*.” The *Mei Ha-shiloach* explains on this basis the prophet Shemuel’s response to the people when they begged him to pray when they felt frightened by the extraordinary storm that struck during the summertime: “Heaven forfend that I should sin against God by refraining from praying on your behalf” (Shemuel I 12:23). Failing to pray for somebody in need of prayers is considered “sinful,” and, according to the *Mei Ha-shiloach*, it even falls under the category of withholding wages.

The *Mei Ha-shiloach*’s comments are noteworthy in that he draws no distinction between wages earned by an employee through honest, hard work, and basic consideration and assistance that should be given to somebody who has not done any specific to earn it. For the *Mei Ha-shiloach*, we owe other people our compassion and sensitivity, and some level of assistance, regardless of anything they have done or not done. Just as an employer owes wages to an employee in exchange for the service received, we all owe other people a basic degree of courtesy simply by virtue of their humanity. The Torah demands that we respect the divine spark within all people, and feel responsible to offer help we are capable of offering even to those who have not provided us with any tangible benefit.

Monday

Parashat Kedoshim presents a series of many different commandments, which God introduced by instructing Moshe to convey them to “*kol adat Benei Yisrael*” – “the entire congregation of the Israelites” (19:2). *Torat Kohanim*, cited by Rashi, notes that rather than simply instruct Moshe to relay these commands to *Benei Yisrael*, God emphasizes that they must be presented to “*kol adat Benei Yisrael*” – “the entire congregation.” The reason, *Torat Kohanim* explains, is because this section was to be presented to the entire nation at once, as they assembled together. As opposed to the other laws of the Torah, which did not have to be presented to the entire nation at the same time, the *mitzvot* in Parashat Kedoshim were to be announced at a nationwide assembly, because, in Rashi’s words, “*rov gufei Torah teluyin bah*” – this *parasha* includes “the majority of fundamental Torah principles.”

Chizkuni (based on the *Midrash Tanchuma* 3 and *Vayikra Rabba* 24:5) adds that this *parasha* was presented to the entire nation together because it incorporates all of the Ten Commandments. Just as the Ten Commandments were pronounced to the nation as they assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai, Parashat Kedoshim, which elaborates upon the Ten Commandments, was similarly presented to the entire nation as it assembled together.

Much has been written about the deeper significance of the need for specifically this *parasha* to be presented before an assembly of the entire nation.

Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his *Yalkut Yehuda*, offers several possibilities, including an approach based on the Ramban’s famous explanation of the first command in this *parasha* – “*Kedoshim tiheyu*” (“You shall be sacred”). The Ramban writes that this command requires us to exercise moderation in enjoying the physical delights of the world. Beyond just refraining from forbidden foods and forbidden physical relationships, the Ramban explains, we are also to elevate our lifestyle by refraining from overindulgence in, and excessive preoccupation with, these pleasures. The Ramban mentions also maintaining a dignified style of speech, avoiding excessive idle chatter and vulgarity. In short, according to the Ramban, the command of “*Kedoshim tiheyu*” obligates us to extend beyond the specific “dos” and “don’ts” of Torah law and live a refined, dignified life that revolves around the service of God.

On this basis, Rav Ginsburg suggests an insightful explanation for why specifically this *parasha* needed to be presented at a nationwide assembly. The command of “*Kedoshim tiheyhu*,” which calls upon us to extend beyond the particular obligations and prohibitions explicated by the Torah, could easily result in the fraying of the communal fabric. Each person might decide for himself or herself which standards to maintain, and which behaviors and modes of speech are appropriate and inappropriate, such that the Jewish religion could become a private, individual enterprise, rather than a national and communal way of life. While the Torah certainly leaves some room for personal creativity and self-expression in religious life, it is to be observed and practiced also as a collective, national objective. “*Kedoshim tiheyu*” was pronounced at a nationwide assembly, Rav Ginsburg suggests, to emphasize that the pursuit of *kedusha* must be a collective, and not only individual, effort. We must work together to determine and maintain appropriate standards of conduct, so that we are “sacred” not only on a personal level, but also on a communal level, creating communities and building a collective national image that embody the ideals of *kedusha*. Notwithstanding the importance of each individual utilizing his or her own unique talents, maximizing his or her unique potential, and making his or her unique contribution, we must also strive for a communal quality of *kedusha*, whereby we live a sacred life not only on an individual level, but on a collective level, as well.

Tuesday

The Torah in Parashat Kedoshim introduces the command of *pei’a*, which requires leaving the corner of one’s field for the poor when harvesting the crop: “And when you reap your land’s harvest, do not remove the corner of your field by harvesting it… You shall leave it for the poor and for the foreigner” (19:9-10).

*Or Ha-chayim* observes the curious shift in this verse from the plural form to the singular form. The Torah begins by speaking of the harvest in the plural form – “*u-ve-****kutzrekhem*** *et ketzir* ***artzekhem***” – but then, in commanding that the corner be left intact, the Torah transitions to the singular form – “*lo* ***tekhaleh***.” To explain this shift, *Or Ha-chayim* suggests that the Torah perhaps sought to emphasize that this obligation applies even to an individual’s small, private field. One might have assumed that only vast fields owned by a corporate group are subject to the requirement of *pei’a*, as the corners of these fields can provide a substantial amount of produce for the needy. The corner of a person’s small, individual field, however, will not make much of a difference in alleviating poverty, and thus we might have thought that such properties are excluded from the *pei’a* obligation. The Torah therefore turns to the lone farmer with a small field and issues the command of *pei’a*, clarifying that even in his field, the corner must be left for the poor.

*Or Ha-chayim*’s comments teach us that we should never view ourselves as too small or inadequate to make a contribution to *Am Yisrael* and to the world. Like the farmer depicted by *Or Ha-chayim*, we may at times feel that our “field,” our range of talents and capabilities, are too limited to have any sort of substantial impact. Whatever “corners” we have available to give to important causes might seem too small to justify a sacrifice of time and effort. But the Biblical command of *pei’a*, as understood by *Or Ha-chayim*, teaches us that every “corner” of ourselves that we can contribute is meaningful and significant, and should not be underestimated. No matter how large or small our “field” might be, we must make whatever contribution we can. Every individual has a “field” from which to contribute, and we are all required to contribute, regardless of how small and limited we might think we are.

Wednesday

As mentioned yesterday, one of the *mitzvot* presented in Parashat Kedoshim is that of *pei’a* – the requirement to leave the corner of one’s field for the poor when harvesting the crop (19:9-10).

*Or Ha-chayim*, commenting on this *mitzva*, suggests a deeper layer of meaning underlying the *pei’a* obligation. Noting that the Torah presents this *mitzva* immediately after condemning to *kareit* (eternal excision from the nation) one who transgresses a certain capital offense (the consumption of *pigul*, a type of invalid sacrifice), *Or Ha-chayim* views the law of *pei’a* as symbolically referring to a person who has “harvested” – meaning, destroyed – his being and his soul. The *pei’a* command says that even if one has fallen into the abyss of sin, to the point where the vast majority of his being has been tainted, he must still ensure to maintain, preserve and protect the “*pei’a*,” the portion of his being that still remains intact. Drawing upon Kabbalistic teaching, *Or Ha-chayim* emphasizes that there is an element of purity and goodness within us even after we stumble, and even if we fall into sinful habits. This “corner” remains completely intact – and the *mitzva* of *pei’a*, beyond serving the obvious objective of supporting the needy, also symbolizes the obligation to preserve and build upon that inner spark. It is easy to respond to our failures with despair, by conveniently assuming that we are no longer worthy or capable of serving God. This reaction amounts to “cutting down” the “*pei’a*,” ruining the element of sanctity and nobility that remains within us even if we’ve sinned and strayed. The *mitzva* of *pei’a*, according to *Or Ha-chayim*, teaches us to never overlook or underestimate the precious value of our inner “*pei’a*,” our inner goodness and potential, regardless of how gravely we have erred or failed. The sacred “corner” of our being is precious, and must never be disregarded. We must never deny our potential and capabilities, even if we’ve failed, and must instead recognize the immense value of our “*pei’a*” and utilize it to its very fullest.

Thursday

The Torah in Parashat Kedoshim (19:19) introduces the prohibition of “*sadekha lo tizra kil’ayim*,” which forbids planting different species together. This prohibition actually includes two different types of forbidden agricultural mixtures – *kil’ei zera’im* and *kil’ei ilan*. The command of *kil’ei zera’im* forbids planting seeds of different edible species – such as vegetables, grains or legumes – in close proximity to one another. The law of *kil’ei ilan* prohibits the act of grafting a branch of one species of fruit tree onto a different species of fruit trees (or grafting a branch of a fruit tree onto a non-fruit bearing tree).

Although both prohibitions are issued in a single command, nevertheless, a number of halakhic differences exist between these two laws. Thus, for example, it is permissible to plant different species of fruit trees in close proximity to one another, as the prohibition of *kil’ei ilan* forbids only grafting one species onto another. This is in contrast to *kil’ei zera’im*, which forbids planting seeds of different species near one another. (See Rambam, *Hilkhot Kil’ayim*, chapter 1.)

Additionally, whereas the Torah prohibition of *kil’ei ilan* applies both in the Land of Israel and outside the land, the law of *kil’ei zera’im* applies only in Israel. The Gemara establishes this distinction in Masekhet Kiddushin (39a), where it notes conflicting indications in the verse regarding the relevance of this command outside the Land of Israel. On the one hand, the command of “*sadekha lo tizra kil’ayim*” is presented after the command of *harba’at beheima* – mating two different species of animal, a law which clearly applies in all geographic regions (as it does not at all relate to the ground). This juxtaposition would seem to indicate that agricultural *kil’ayim*, like crossbreeding animals, is forbidden even outside the Land of Israel. On the other hand, the Torah speaks here specifically of “*sadekha*” – “**your** field,” which seems to refer specifically to *Eretz Yisrael*, the land especially designated for the Jewish Nation. To reconcile these conflicting implications, the Gemara distinguishes between the two prohibitions included under the command of “*sadekha lo tizra kil’ayim*.” The prohibition of tree grafting, like crossbreeding animals, is forbidden even outside the Land of Israel, whereas the prohibition of planting seeds of different species in close proximity to one another applies only in the Land of Israel. The *Rishonim* clarify that *kil’ei zera’im* is entirely permissible outside *Eretz Yisrael*, and is not forbidden even on the level of rabbinic enactment. This is in contrast to the prohibition of *kil’ei ha-kerem* – planting seeds of vegetables or grains in close proximity to a vine, which the Torah forbids in Sefer Devarim (22:9), and which applies on the level of Torah law only in *Eretz Yisrael*, and on the level of rabbinic enactment outside the Land of Israel. (See Rambam, *Hilkhot Kil’ayim* 1:3.)

The Gemara in Masekhet Chulin (115a) establishes that although planting different species of seeds together, and grafting one species onto another, is forbidden, nevertheless, the products of this forbidden act are permissible for consumption. The basis for this conclusion is the juxtaposition noted above between this command and the prohibition of *harba’at beheima*. Although crossbreeding different species of animals is forbidden, the product of crossbred kosher species is permissible for consumption. The Gemara derives this rule from the fact that the Torah made a point of disqualifying the product of crossbred animals from use as a sacrifice. Elsewhere, in Masekhet Bekhorot (12a), the Gemara notes a seemingly superfluous word in the Torah’s discussion of the eligibility of different species for sacrifices (“*shor o khesev or eiz*” – Vayikra 22:27), and interprets the extra word as indicating the exclusion of the product of crossbreeding. If the Torah specifically forbade offering such an animal as a sacrifice, the Gemara reasons, then we may conclude that this animal is permissible for consumption. Hence, by virtue of the association between this prohibition and the prohibition of agricultural mixtures, the Gemara deduces that the products of different seeds planted together, or of grafting, may be eaten. These prohibitions differ in this respect from *kil’ei ha-kerem*, the product of which is strictly forbidden for consumption and even for other forms of benefit. (See Mishna, Kil’ayim 8:1.)

Friday

Yesterday, we noted the prohibition of *kil’ei ilan*, which the Torah introduces in Parashat Kedoshim (“*sadekha lo tizra kil’ayim*” – 19:19), and which forbids grafting a branch of one species onto a tree of a different species. As we saw, the Gemara in Masekhet Kiddushin (39a) draws an association between this prohibition and the prohibition of *harba’at beheima* – crossbreeding different species of animal – which the Torah presents immediately before stating the law of *kil’ei ilan*. The Gemara establishes on the basis of this juxtaposition that the prohibition of *kil’ei ilan* applies everywhere, even outside the Land of Israel, just as the prohibition of *harba’at beheima* – which does not at all relate to the ground – is not limited to the Land of Israel.

*Tosafot Ha-Rosh*, commenting to the Gemara’s discussion in a much different context (Sota 43b), suggests extending further the association between these two prohibitions. The Mishna in Masekhet Kil’ayim (8:1) states explicitly that although the Torah forbids crossbreeding animals, once it has been done, it is entirely permissible to own, keep and care for the animal produced through this forbidden procedure. One may raise the animal and use it for any purpose, including for consumption. By the same token, *Tosafot Ha-Rosh* writes, it would appear that once a branch has been grafted onto a tree of a different species, it is permissible to keep the tree in one’s property, and even care for it. Since the parameters of the *kil’ei ilan* prohibition are linked to those of *harba’at beheima*, the prohibition is limited to the act of grafting, and does not extend to the product, as is the case with *harba’at beheima*.

This position is also taken by the Ritva, in his commentary to Masekhet Kiddushin. (However, Rav Chaim of Sanz (*Divrei Chayim*, Y.D. 1:60) asserts that the Ritva refers here only to the Torah prohibition of *kil’ei ilan*, and concedes that maintaining the grafted tree is forbidden by force of rabbinic enactment.) Similarly, the Maharsha, commenting to Masekhet Sota, writes that one who has a tree upon which his worker grafted a branch is not in violation of any *halakha* – clearly indicating that it is permissible to own and maintain a grafted tree after the fact. Numerous *Acharonim* noted that the Rambam mentions the prohibition against maintaining vegetables and grains of different species that were planted together in violation of Torah law (*Hilkhot Kilayim* 1:4), but issues no such ruling in regard to a grafted tree (see *Hilkhot Kil’ayim* 1:5-6). This would certainly seem to indicate that the Rambam allows keeping and maintaining a tree that had been grafted in violation of the *kil’ei ilan* prohibition.

Interestingly, while the Rosh expresses this lenient view in his *Tosafot Ha-Rosh*, he rules otherwise in *Hilkhot Kil’ayim* (3), stating that both grafting and maintaining a grafted tree violates the prohibition of *kil’ei ilan*. This stringent position is accepted by the Rosh’s son, the *Tur* (Y.D. 295), and this is the ruling of the *Shulchan Arukh* (Y.D. 295:7). The Rosh in *Hilkhot Kil’ayim* writes that one who maintains a grafted tree is liable to punishment just like one who performs the act of grafting, clearly indicating that maintaining the tree constitutes a Torah prohibition, and is not forbidden merely by force of rabbinic enactment. Nevertheless, a number of halakhic authorities felt that maintaining a grafted tree is not included under the Torah prohibition, and was enacted by *Chazal*. This was the view of the *Chazon Ish* (*Kil’ayim*, 2:9,11), who ruled that in situations of uncertainty, or when other mitigating factors apply, there is room to allow maintaining a grafted tree. Thus, for example, the *Chazon Ish* permitted owning and maintaining a tree grafted with several different species of citrus fruits, given the uncertainty as to whether different citrus species are considered different species with respect to the law of *kil’ei ilan* (as discussed at length by [Rav Asher Weiss](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%9B%D7%9C%D7%90%D7%99-%D7%90%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%9F-%D7%AA%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%97/)).

It should also be noted that within the stringent position accepted by the *Shulchan Arukh*, different views exist as to which kinds of “maintenance” are forbidden once the grafting has taken place. At one extreme, the Chid”a, in *Birkei Yosef* (295:7), and the *Chazon Ish* (*Kil’ayim* 2:9), ruled that the grafted tree must be uprooted, and one may not even allow it to remain in the ground in his property. By contrast, Rav Yitzchak Eizik Herzog, writing in the fifth volume of the journal *Techumin*, ruled based on several sources that once the grafted branch has completely blended into the tree, there is no longer any prohibition against maintaining the tree, and it may even be planted in the ground and tended to. In between these two extremes, some expressed the view that although one may not plant a grafted tree, or tend to it if it is already in the ground, the tree does not need to be uprooted, and may be left in the ground. (See sources cited by [Rav Eliezer Melamed](https://ph.yhb.org.il/17-03-07/).)

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