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When Prohibitions Collide

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

Two sentences after the Torah's mandate of *Lifnei iver lo titein michshol* (which includes the prohibition of misleading another, even through the passive withholding of vital information; [Talmud Bavli Moed Katan 5a] see previous study), the text delineates an equally powerful, far-reaching directive: *Lo telech rachil b'amecha*, "Do not travel as a gossipmonger among your people."

From this commandment and other sources in the Torah the rabbis identify three levels of prohibited interpersonal speech as falling under the general prohibition of *rechilut* (gossip).

1. *Motzi shem ra*, slander: The most severe form of prohibited interpersonal speech: the intentional spreading of damaging untruths about another individual.

2. *Lashon hara*, evil speech: The spreading of damaging information about another individual, even if the information is true.

3. *Rechilut*, gossip: The sharing of any personal information about another individual outside of that individual's presence, if there is the slightest chance that the information shared will result in the creation of ill will.

Rabbinic literature is replete with references concerning the tragic effects of unfettered speech (see Tazria-Metzora 3, Approaches D, E). The prevalence of this phenomenon (we are almost all guilty of the transgressions of prohibited speech) combines with the terrible damage that can be wrought upon the lives of others to make the ongoing effect of these sins particularly devastating.

What should our posture be, however, when the prohibition against *rechilut* conflicts with the prohibition of *lifnei iver*; when information is requested of us, the sharing of which might be damaging to one individual while the withholding of which might be damaging to another?

What if, for example, I am requested to give a job reference concerning an acquaintance and the information to which I am privy will be harmful to the candidate? What if I am asked by a friend concerning a budding romantic relationship and, again, the information that I would share would be less than flattering?

The responses of halacha to these commonly occurring dilemmas are complex and vary on a case-by-case basis, as the law struggles to reconcile the conflicting demands of these two significant mitzvot.

Four commonsense rules, however, can be helpful as a guide in all cases.

1. Explore the motivations: What is the impetus behind our intent to share this information? Are we motivated in any way by jealousy or personal animus? Are we fully aware of the underlying forces that drive us to speak?

2. Study the facts: Are we certain of the veracity of information that we intend to share? What is the nature of our sources? Too often, damaging hearsay is repeated as fact, with devastating consequences.

3. Examine the relevance: Is the information we plan to share relevant to the situation at hand? Are we limiting our response to the necessary information or are we adding and embellishing beyond the essential facts?

4. Seek halachic counsel: Many of us tend to request halachic guidance only in areas of ritual concern such as kashrut and Shabbat. Jewish law, however, is meant to serve as a guide in all arenas of life, particularly when it comes to our ethical and moral behavior.

Seeking appropriate halachic counsel before we speak about others is a sensible, often necessary step. Words, once spoken, can never be fully retracted.

On the other hand, the failure to share warranted information can cause irreparable damage to the unsuspecting. The burden of our intended action or

inaction should, therefore, weigh heavily upon us. Decisions should not be made in haste, but only after due deliberation. Consultation with the proper halachic advisor can help grant perspective, allowing the wide-ranging

Normal Holiness

Rabbi David Gottlieb

This week's Torah portion opens with the seminal charge to live a life of holiness: "Daber el kol adas Benei Yisroel," speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, "ve'amarta alehem kedoshim ti'hiyu," and say to them, you must be holy, "ki kadosh ani Hashem Elokechem," because I, Hashem your God, is holy (Vayikra 19:2). The significance of this verse cannot be overstated as it articulates nothing less than the mission of the Jewish people, to be a goy kadosh, a holy people!

Accenting this importance, Rashi cites the Midrash (Sifra 1:1) which infers from the fact that Moshe was instructed to "speak to the entire assembly" that this command (and the subsequent pesukim) was said to a unified gathering of the entire nation. The Midrash explains that this national audience was required, "mipnei she'rov gufei Torah teluyan bah," because the majority of the Torah's essential laws are contained in this section.

The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe) goes even further and suggests that the command "daber el kol adas Benei Yisroel" conveys not only how this parsha was taught but, more importantly, how it should be fulfilled.

When considering a life of kedushah a person may be tempted to isolate him or herself from other people. This type of isolation, which the Chasam Sofer refers to as "hisbode'dus," would seem to be the ideal way to achieve holiness. After all, if no one else is around then it is easier to control the distractions and temptations which normally compromise the person's pursuit of kedushah. Moreover, someone who lived alone would be freed from the responsibility of worrying about the needs of others and instead could focus solely on his or her own religious development.

Despite the apparent benefits of isolation the Chasam Sofer emphatically rejects this approach. The ideal is not to run away to the desert or to the forest even if the motivation to do so is for spiritual refinement. Rather,

experience of Jewish law to inform those decisions.

Great caution must be exercised when the prohibitions of lifnei iver and rechilus collide. The welfare of others hangs in the balance.

the goal of life is to achieve holiness with "kol adas Benei Yisroel," in the context of the community. Furthermore, the Chasam Sofer maintains that part of our responsibility – despite any risks that this might present – is to interact with other people and "le'lamdam binah u'lehaskil be'toras Hashem," to teach others about the beauty of Torah and mitzvos.

These comments of the Chasam Sofer compliment the famous teaching of Chazal that recounts the conversation that took place when Moshe initially came up Har Sinai to receive the Torah. Before God could give the Torah to Moshe the angels started to complain and asked: "mah le'yalud ishah beineinu," by what right is a human being invading the celestial heavens? They continued and questioned the very legitimacy of giving the Torah, something so holy to someone who is mere flesh and blood.

The Ribbono Shel Olam turned to Moshe and instructed him to answer the angels. Moshe replied by noting that the Torah describes the exodus from Egypt and, therefore, he asks the angels rhetorically, "were you slaves in Egypt? Were you liberated?" Furthermore, the Torah commands that we must stop working and rest on Shabbos; once again Moshe asks the angels if they work during the week so that they need a command to rest.

Moshe gives a number of other examples but they all make same critical point: The Torah was meant for real people living real lives. The Torah is not for angels or for people trying to become angels; the angels are in the heavens, this world is for human beings. Of course the one catch is that we are expected to sanctify our lives. "Kedoshim tihiyu" demands not that we avoid normal human experiences but that we hallow them.

And "daber el kol adas Benei Yisroel" teaches us that kedusha is meant to be achieved not in isolation but within the community and through normal human interactions.

No End

Rabbi Josh Hoffman

This week's parsha, Kedoshim, begins with God telling Moshe, "speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for holy am I, God, your Lord.'" (Vayikra 19:2). Rashi, citing the midrash, notes that from the fact that God told Moshe to address his remarks to the entire assembly of the people, we learn that this parsha was said at a gathering of the entire assembly of Israel, because most of the essentials of the Torah depend upon it. We need to understand what the midrash means by saying that most of the essentials of the Torah are included in this parsha, and why, because of this, it needed to be delivered before the entire nation.

Rabbi Gedalyohu Schorr, in his commentary *Ohr Gedalyohu* to parshas Kedoshim, cites the midrash as saying that parshas Kedoshim is a restatement, of the Decalogue - the Aseres Hadibros - known popularly as the Ten Commandments. For example, in the Decalogue we are told of our obligation to honor our parents, and in parshas Kedoshim we are told to fear our parents. The medieval commentator Chizkuni demonstrates how each of the mitzvos in the Decalogue is mentioned in parshas Kedoshim. According to Rabbi Schorr, the midrash is not only a restatement of the Decalogue, but an expansion of the mitzvos it contains. Just as the mitzvoh of fearing one's parents reveals that our obligation to our parents entails more than giving them honor, as was stated in the Decalogue, so too is this true of all the other mitzvos which it includes. Rav Saadia Gaon, as cited by Rashi to parshas Mishpotim (Shemos 23:12), writes - reflecting a statement of the rabbis in the Midrash Rabbah to parshas Naso - that, in fact, all of the six hundred thirteen mitzvos of the Torah are included in the Aseres Hadibros.

Rabbi Schorr, however, goes further and writes that this kind of expansion of scope of the mitzvos is characteristic not only of those mitzvos included in the Decalogue, but, on a broader level, it is characteristic of all the mitzvos of the Torah. This is so, he writes, because the parsha begins with a charge to the people to be holy, as God is holy. Ramban explains the term 'holy' as a need to add precautions in our observance of the mitzvos, separating ourselves even from items which, according to the strict letter of the law, are seemingly permitted. In short, we

need to sanctify ourselves through that which is, strictly speaking, permitted. It is because the parsha begins with this mitzvoh, writes Rabbi Schorr, that it goes on to restate the Aseres Hadibros, thus showing that just as the Aseres Hadibros expand into other mitzvos, so must we expand each individual mitzvoh, in terms of our observance, in order to attain holiness.

The idea propounded by Rabbi Schorr, based on the Ramban, that we need to expand the scope of all the mitzvos, may reflect a response that the Rambam sent to a student, who wrote to him that he did not understand how he could recite, on Yom HaKippurim, the standard form of vidui, or 'confession,' since it includes many sins which he knows for a fact that he did not transgress. The Rambam answered his student that if he would truly understand what our obligation to God is, he would understand that he does, indeed, need to recite the full text of the vidui. This response of the Rambam reflects, in turn, a story told of Rav Saadia Gaon, who once visited a town, where he stayed overnight at an inn. The innkeeper, not knowing the identity of his guest, treated him very roughly. The next day, there was an announcement that Rav Saadia Gaon was in town and would be delivering a Torah lecture, or a shiur. The innkeeper attended the shiur, and thereby discovered the true identity of the man he had treated so discourteously. After the shiur, he went over to Rav Saadia Gaon and asked forgiveness, saying that had he known the day before what he knows now, he would have acted much differently. When Rav Saadia returned to his home, he reflected on the words of the innkeeper, and began to cry. He realized that his knowledge of Torah and his relationship with God expands each day, and with that expansion of knowledge comes an awareness that his previous service of God was not adequate, and, therefore, he needed to repent for it. Rav Saadia, in effect, was saying that there is never any end to the level of growth we much strive for in our observance of the mitzvos and our relationship with God.

Based on the comments of Rabbi Schorr, the Rambam and Rav Saadia Gaon, we can now understand the comment of the midrash cited by Rashi. Parshas Kedoshim contains within it most of the essentials of the Torah

in that it demonstrates to us the fact that the quest for holiness requires us to be aware that there is no end to our obligations to God. New situations generate new opportunities to expand our service and devotion to Him. This is true on the individual level, but all the more so on the collective level. The task of the Jewish nation, as it was charged at Mt. Sinai before receiving the Torah, is to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Shemos 19:6). We have mentioned many times Rav Kook's explanation of

Judaism's Radical Notion of Holiness

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

One of the most profound statements in the Torah is found in the opening verses of this week's parasha, parashat Kedoshim.

The Torah in Leviticus 19:2, states that G-d said to Moses to speak to the entire people of Israel and to say to them: "Kedoshim tee'yoo, kee kah'dosh ah'nee Hashem Eh'lo'kay'chem." You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy.

Parashat Kedoshim is a watershed parasha, containing 51 Mitzvot. The fact that a single Torah portion can contain such a large number of commandments, is in itself an extraordinary testimony to the centrality of the parasha.

In parashat Kedoshim we are taught that the idea of holiness applies to every aspect of human life. It impacts on religious rituals, business ethics, proper behavior toward other people, especially the poor and the afflicted. Perhaps more than any other parasha, it was parashat Kedoshim that set the tone for Jewish life. It is, arguably, the source of many of the revolutionary concepts that Judaism shared with humanity over the millennia, which have become an essential part of what is known today as "Western Culture."

As we have previously argued (Kedoshim 5760-2000), human beings have the astonishing capacity to rationalize virtually every illicit type of behavior. By declaring that all behavior between "consenting adults" is acceptable—prostitution, pornography, adultery, and other dubious behaviors—these behaviors have been stealthily transformed into socially acceptable behaviors. This kind of thinking is not new. It was not unusual for ancient Greek philosophers to argue that the "man-boy" sexual relationship that was commonly practiced was a superior form of human love, even though it was hardly a relationship between consenting adults.

this charge, that the Jewish nation needs to demonstrate holiness within the context of a nation, with all the political, economic and social elements that are involved in the dynamics of a nation. This national setting provides a much wider range of challenges and opportunities in our service of God, and we need to explore all of the ramifications that such a setting has in terms of Torah observance and our relationship with God. For this reason, parshas Kedoshim needed to be given to the nation as a whole.

It is only when we assert that a human being is "holy," and a reflection of Divine holiness, that these seemingly powerful rational and convincing arguments collapse. While it is true that in some relationships between consenting adults there does not appear to be a third innocent party who suffers, nevertheless, a human being who is created in G-d's image is holy. We may not take advantage of a prostitute, or a porn-performer, even though they think that their activities are to their own benefit, because they too are created in the Divine image and are a reflection of the Divine. Once the idea of the reflection of the Divine is eliminated, then most behaviors become acceptable.

Nachmanides (Ramban, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270, Spanish Torah commentator) states, citing the Torat Cohanim (Halachic Midrash on Leviticus), "Kedoshim tee'yoo-peh'roo'shim tee'yoo," "You shall be holy" means that you shall be "separate." A Jew is to be on a different spiritual plane from others. Those who seek to live exalted moral lives must separate themselves from the evil influences that reduce them, both as Jews and as human beings. They must constantly pursue goodness and aspire to greater morality.

The philosophers Martin Buber (1878-1965, Austrian born Jewish philosopher) and Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929, German born Jewish philosopher) speak of the "holy" and the "not yet holy." Everything and everyone has the potential to be holy, if they truly work at it.

The great Rabbi Kook (Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, 1865-1935) proclaimed: "Hah'yah'shahn yit'chah'daysh, v'hah'chah'dash yit'kah'daysh." That which is old shall be renewed, and that which is new, shall be made holy.

The tendency of many today is to always look upon that

which is old, as primitive and meaningless, and that which is new, as promising and exciting. We can, Rabbi Kook argues, make the old exciting and relevant, but we must make certain that the new and attractive ideas do not lead us into false temptation. We must always make certain that that which is new, novel and celebrated, is made holy.

Nachmanides condemns those people who work within the letter of the law, but manipulate the law to become “nah’vahl bir’shoot ha’Torah,” degenerate within the parameters of the Torah. The Torah expects more of a Jew than mere obedience to the letter of the law. The Torah expects Jews to become an exalted people, and a holy nation.

The rabbis of the Talmud speak of the person who is “toh’vayl v’sheh’retz b’yah’doh,” one who goes to the Mikvah to declare and demonstrate his purity, but is holding on to

The Unique Kedusha of Am Yisrael

Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

At the end of Parashat Kedoshim, the Torah says, “And you shall be holy unto Me, for I, G-d, am holy, and I set you apart from the nations to be Mine” (Vayikra 20:26). Rashi explains: “And I set you apart from the nations to be Mine: To desist from sin and to accept upon oneself the yoke of Heaven.” Let us attempt to understand what is unique about the level of kedusha that Am Yisrael has that makes it a higher level of kedusha than the standard kedusha every human being has. Certainly, we have 613 mitzvot, while the nations of the world have only seven. However, the fact that we have been given more mitzvot is only a quantitative difference, not a qualitative one. After all, in keeping their seven mitzvot, the other nations must also “desist from sin and accept upon themselves the yoke of Heaven.” If so, how do we understand the true nature of the difference between us, according to Rashi’s definition that the difference between us and them is desistance from sin and acceptance of the yoke of Heaven?

To answer this question, we must open with the words of the Ramban in Parashat Bo. Commenting on the passuk of “hachodesh hazeh lachem,” the Ramban writes that there is a mitzvah to count months without giving them names. The purpose of this is to remind us of the very first month, the month in which we left Mitzrayim, and all of the miracles performed for us in that month. Every time we mention the ninth month, for instance, it is the

the defiling creature while he is in the waters of purification. How sad it is to see those who have the outer trappings of piety, but refuse to give up the inner defilement within them. Unfortunately, the inner defilement often winds up as the controlling force of their lives and being.

It is only when people are holy, that time, and home and relationships become holy.

This is the exhortation of G-d to His people Israel. It is also a powerful message for all of humankind.

In the closing verses of this week’s parasha, Leviticus 20:26, G-d calls out to His people: “Vee’h’yee’tehm lee kedoshim, kee kah’dohsh ah’nee Hashem.” And you shall be holy to Me because I, your L-rd, am holy.

This is the ultimate human challenge—and the ultimate human calling.

ninth month from Exodus. This is similar to the way we remember Shabbat, referring to the second day of the week, for example, as “sheini baShabbat.” This is how the calendar was counted until Churban haBayit. When we returned to Eretz Yisrael from Bavel, however, we brought with us the names which we still use today: Tishrei, Cheshvan, Kislev, and so on. However, in Tanach we find two months named even before Churban haBayit, despite the prohibition. The first naming appears in I Melachim 1:6, where it says that Shlomo began construction of the Beit HaMikdash in the month of Ziv, the second month (Iyar). The month in which he finished construction, the navi tells us in the eighth perek, was chodesh ha’eitanim, the seventh month (Tishrei). Why did Shlomo change the established halacha, giving names to the months when it was still forbidden to do so?

The word ziv appears in Uva L’Tzion as part of the translation of “the entire world is filled with His glory – malya chol ar’a ziv yekarei.” Ziv is the light that shines from within nature, light that comes from daily service. Shlomo wished to teach, through the building of the Beit HaMikdash, that wherever we go in life, we must bring the Beit HaMikdash with us as an example of how to reveal the glory of Heaven through the physical existence. In the same way, we must try to reveal the glory of Heaven through our own daily lives. This is why Shlomo named

the month in which the Beit HaMikdash was built Ziv, to remind us of our mission to spread the light of Hashem. One who remembers this lesson, and lives it, will merit true strength.

The day of the week in which we see a little bit of the light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu revealed through nature is Shabbat. This is why the gemara in Rosh HaShana says that the shir the levi'im sang over the mussaf of Shabbat was called "haziv lach." Tosfot explains that this refers to Shirat Ha'azinu, which, when divided into six parts, has the roshei teivot "haziv lach." This is the kedusha that is unique to Am Yisrael, which the other nations do not have. Through us, the glory of Heaven is revealed in every other object that exists in this world.

The month in which we left Mitzrayim has the zodiac sign of the lamb. The lamb is an animal that is led, rather than choosing its own path. In Nissan, Hashem led us out

Of Love and Hate

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

At the centre of the mosaic books is Vayikra. At the centre of Vayikra is the "holiness code" (chapter 19) with its momentous call: "You shall be holy because I, the Lord your G-d, am holy." And at the centre of chapter 19 is a brief paragraph which, by its positioning, is the apex, the high point, of the Torah:

Do not hate your brother in your heart. You must surely admonish your neighbour and not bear sin because of him. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. Love your neighbour as yourself. I am G-d. (19: 17-18)

I want, in this study, to examine the second of these provisions: "You must surely admonish your neighbour and not bear sin because of him."

Rambam and Ramban agree in seeing two quite different levels of meaning in this sentence. This is how Rambam puts it:

When one person sins against another, the latter should not hate him and remain silent. As it is said about the wicked: "And Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor evil, although Absalom hated Amnon." Rather, he is commanded to speak to him and to say to him, "Why did you do such-and-such to me? Why did you sin against me in such-and-such a matter?" As it is said, "You must surely admonish your neighbour." If he repents and requests forgiveness from him, he must forgive and not be cruel, as it is said, "And Abraham prayed to G-d..."

of Mitzrayim miraculously. But one cannot receive the Torah through nissim. In order to receive Torah, you must have the ability to make your own independent decisions. Therefore, the month of Iyar, which was a month of traveling through the desert, has the zodiac sign of the ox. The ox is an animal that moves on its own. After a month of learning to act like the ox, we could receive the Torah. This occurred in the month of Sivan, which has the zodiac sign of the twins, symbolizing our partnership with Hashem in Torah.

We were granted the privilege of perceiving Hashem's light twice in the month of Ziv in our own times – on 5 Iyar and on 28 Iyar. And to the extent that we understand our mission, to bring glory to Heaven through all of our actions, we will merit kedusha, taharah, and to see the light of Hashem in our times once again, with a geulah shleimah speedily in our days.

If someone sees his fellow committing a sin or embarking on a path that is not good, it is a commandment to make him return to the good and to make known to him that he is sinning against himself by his evil actions, as it is said, "You must surely admonish your neighbour" . . .

Likewise, Ramban:

"You shall surely remonstrate with your neighbour" – this is a separate command, namely that we must teach him the reproof of instruction. "And not bear sin because of him" – for you will bear sin because of his transgression if you do not rebuke him . . .

However, it seems to me that the correct interpretation is that the expression "you shall surely remonstrate" is to be understood in the same way as "And Abraham remonstrated with Avimelekh". The verse is thus saying: "Do not hate your brother in your heart when he does something to you against your will, but instead you should remonstrate with him, saying, 'Why did you do this to me?' and you will not bear sin because of him by covering up your hatred in your heart and not telling him, for when you remonstrate with him, he will justify himself before you or he will regret his action and admit his sin, and you will forgive him."

The difference between the two interpretations is that one is social, the other interpersonal. On Rambam's

second and Ramban's first reading, the command is about collective responsibility. When we see a fellow Jew about to commit a sin, we must try to persuade him not to do so. We are not allowed to say, "That is a private matter between him and G-d." "All Israel," said the sages, "are sureties for one another." We are each responsible, not only for our own conduct, but for the behaviour of others. That is a major chapter in Jewish law and thought.

However, both Rambam and Ramban are aware that this is not the plain sense of the text. Taken in context, what we have before us is a subtle account of the psychology of interpersonal relations.

Judaism has sometimes been accused by Christianity of being about justice rather than love ("You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"). This is entirely untrue. There is a wonderful teaching in Avot deRabbi Natan: "Who is the greatest hero? One who turns an enemy into a friend." What sets the Torah apart is its understanding of the psychology of hatred.

If someone has done us harm, it is natural to feel aggrieved. What then are we to do in order to fulfil the command, "Do not hate your brother in your heart"? The Torah's answer is: Speak. Converse. Challenge. Remonstrate. It may be that the other person had a good reason for doing what he did. Or it may be that he was acting out of malice, in which case our remonstration will give him, if he so chooses, the opportunity to apologise, and we should then forgive him. In either case, talking it through is the best way of restoring a broken relationship. Once again we encounter here one of the leitmotifs of Judaism: the power of speech to create, sustain and mend relationships.

Maimonides cites a key proof-text. The story is told (2 Samuel 13) of how Amnon, one of King David's children, raped his half-sister Tamar. When Absalom, Tamar's brother, hears about the episode, his reaction seems on the face of it irenic, serene:

Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet, now my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman. When King David heard all this, he was furious. Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad . . ."

Appearances, however, deceive. Absalom is anything

but forgiving. He waits for two years, and then invites Amnon to a festive meal at sheep-shearing time. He gives instructions to his men: "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him." And so it happened. Absalom's silence was not the silence of forgiveness but of hate – the hate of which Pierre de LaClos spoke in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* when he wrote the famous line: "Revenge is a dish best served cold."

There is another equally powerful example in Bereishith:

*Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age, and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him (*velo yachlu dabro leshalom*, literally, "they could not speak with him to peace").*

On this, R. Jonathan Eybeschutz (c. 1690-1764) comments: "Had they been able to sit together as a group, they would have spoken to one another and remonstrated with each other, and would eventually have made their peace with one another. The tragedy of conflict is that it prevents people from talking together and listening to one another." A failure to communicate is often the prelude to revenge.

The inner logic of the two verses in our sedra is therefore this: "Love your neighbour as yourself. But not all neighbours are loveable. There are those who, out of envy or malice, have done you harm. I do not therefore command you to live as if you were angels, without any of the emotions natural to human beings. I do however forbid you to hate. That is why, when someone does you wrong, you must confront the wrongdoer. You must tell him of your feelings of hurt and distress. It may be that you completely misunderstood his intentions. Or it may be that he genuinely meant to do you harm, but now, faced with the reality of the injury he has done you, he may sincerely repent of what he did. If, however, you fail to talk it through, there is a real possibility that you will bear a grudge and in the fullness of time, come to take revenge – as did Absalom."

What is so impressive about the Torah is that it both articulates the highest of high ideals, and at the same time speaks to us as human beings. If we were angels it would be easy to love one another. But we are not. An ethic that commands us to love our enemies, without any hint as to how we are to achieve this, is simply unliveable. Instead, the Torah sets out a realistic programme. By being honest

with one another, talking things through, we may be able to achieve reconciliation – not always, to be sure, but often.

How much distress and even bloodshed might be spared if humanity heeded this simple command.

The Structure of Kedoshim

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

Parshas Kedoshim can be divided into two segments. The first is a flurry of mitzvos, while the latter is a list of punishments for aveiros (sins) associated with the heathens of Canaan, surrounded by exhortations to be different from the nations. (Most of these aveiros and this exhortation were introduced in Acharei Mos).

A closer look at the first part of Kedoshim arouses curiosity, for the mitzvos featured are scarcely separated by a psik (paragraph end-point) which indicates the conclusion of a theme. Rather, seemingly unrelated mitzvos are grouped together as one paragraph, such that the first four aliyos contain 68 mitzvos with very few divisions. Why are the mitzvos not separated by topic?

One can suggest that the admixture of mitzvos is to convey a crucial lesson. The entirety of philosophical teachings of Sefer Vayikra until this point focused on proper attitude and outlook in avodas Hashem (service of God). This is precisely why Vayikra is termed “Sefer Ha-Avodah”, as divine service is its total message. In Parshas Acharei Mos, the Torah completed its instruction about the requisite manner in which to approach Hashem, and in Parshas Kedoshim, we are commanded to act upon what has been taught and immerse ourselves in mitzvah performance. As much as we ponder and study the hashkafa (ideology) of avodas Hashem, we get nowhere unless we actually perform His will and subserviate ourselves to the hundreds of mitzvos which we are commanded. This is precisely why the mitzvos of Kedoshim are presented as an unrelated cascade of regulations - for total, unselective immersion in mitzvah performance is the only true and meaningful manifestation of divine service.

Why does the Torah reserve the latter portion of Parshas Kedoshim for punishments for commission of acts associated with the heathens and elaborate adjurement not to mimic the ways of the nations which engaged in these and other abominable practices? Perhaps the Torah is teaching a lesson of perspective. Please allow me to explain.

Parshas Kedoshim addresses the need to be fully

engaged and immersed in mitzvos, as stated above. In order to fully appreciate a life governed and dominated by mitzvos, we are taught to contrast our way of life with that of others. For it is not only the physical mitzvah which brings us closer to God; the element of differentiation from others, knowing that we are leading lives governed by God’s will and constantly performing acts to His desire, is critical to imbue in us the preciousness of our path.

This is precisely why the Torah begins Parshas Kedoshim with, “...you shall be holy (‘kedoshim’), for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (19:2), and the parshah concludes the bulk of its mitzvos and punishments with, “And you shall be holy to me, for I am holy, and I have separated you from the nations to myself” (20:26). For being holy by leading a life of mitzvos is attained in great measure by the realization of the uniqueness of such a life and its goal. Thus, the mitzvos which are presented between the two exhortations to be holy are to be viewed as directed toward this overall theme. If mitzvah performance is projected toward kedushah and we are conscious of the special relationship we have with God by doing His will, we will become sanctified. If mitzvos are viewed as a routine or as a cultural or mere ritual requirement, they will not enable us to approach Hashem and perfect ourselves.

It is also noteworthy that the final pasuk (verse) of Parshas Kedoshim bears a further warning about the issur (prohibition) of Ov and Yidoni (20:27). Should this point not have been made earlier, such that pasuk 26 (above - “And you shall be holy...”) forms the last verse of the parshah? Why is pasuk 27 placed as the last statement of the parshah? Perhaps we are being warned that attainment of kedushah is defined exclusively as fulfillment of Hashem’s will. The goal of holiness is to be close to God; reaching levels of kedushah for any other reason is out of line. Thus, the parshah concludes with a punishment for a prohibition, as adherence to God’s will and closeness to Him is the only point of striving toward kedushah.