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Psyched for Torah: Expansion of the Self

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

What is love? We usually relegate its exploration to the arts, but there are psychologists who conduct scientific research to try and better understand this allusive concept. One theory of love which has some empirical backing was presented by a married couple, Arthur and Elain Aron in the 1980's. Their theory, the self-expansion model of love, has two primary components. One component is that we are generally motivated to expand our sense of self by entering into relationships with others, which helps increase our own potential and effectiveness. The other component is that in this drive to expand ourselves through relationships, other people become included to some extent in our own sense of self. We expand our own identities to include others.

There are two fundamental directives in Parshat Kedoshim that greatly impact our religious and ethical lives: be holy (kedoshim tihiyu) and love your fellow like yourself (ve-ahavta le-reiacha kamocho). Both are broad in scope, coloring numerous interactions and influencing many decisions. Yet, both holiness and love are abstract and complex concepts that defy easy definition. What does it really mean to be holy? What does love entail? Is it really realistic to expect us to love another person as much as we love ourselves? In his introduction to his Talmudic work, Sharei Yosher, Rabbi Shimon Shkop presents a fascinating analysis that intertwines these two commandments in a way that relates to love as being an expansion of the self.

One of the difficulties in fully understanding what it means to be holy, is that the pasuk states that we should be holy because G-d is holy (Vayikra 19:2). Whatever the definition of holiness we present, it must account for the ability to describe G-d as holy as well. The midrash adds a

curious insertion into the text, where after commanding us to be holy, G-d asks rhetorically, "Perhaps you may think that you could be as holy as I am?" That is impossible, for "My holiness is greater than your holiness." If we follow the midrashic reading, our definition of holiness must also contain a hierarchical component of G-d's holiness being greater than our own.

Building off these two points, Rabbi Shkop argues for a definition of holiness, which encompasses no less than "the entire foundation and root for our life's purpose." Holiness can be defined as existing and acting in complete dedication to helping others. As such, G-d, Who created and directs this world for the sake of others, with no "personal" benefit, serves as the ultimate paradigm of holiness.

Yet, as the midrash makes clear, we can never reach such a level and nor should we even aspire to such an intense degree of holiness. G-d created us with an ego. We are all self-interested. The commandment of "loving your fellow like yourself" is formulated by Hillel in the negative: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to someone else." This is because, Rabbi Shkop argues, that when it comes to bestowing positive benefits, it is fitting for us to prioritize ourselves. In addition, Rabbi Akiva teaches us that our lives take precedence over our friends' lives, so that we should prioritize saving ourselves before others. While we need to avoid harming others, we otherwise come first.

The challenge becomes balancing these two concepts that seem to be pushing in different directions. On the one hand, we are egoistic and focus on the self, and on the other, we are holy and do for others. The key to reconciling these concepts, Rabbi Shkop suggests, lies within our definition of self or "ani." Our starting point is with a self-absorbed

“ani,” which only cares about the physical self. We can then expand the definition of self to include our spiritual elements. A step further would be to include our family members within our senses of self, and continue to expand to include the Jewish people, and even the entirety of creation within our definition of self.

When in Rome...? Israel and Morality

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

We are taught by tradition to observe “minhag hamakom”, the custom of the “house”. When in someone’s territory, we are to respect and abide by his rules and traditions. Our rabbis were clear that this is the best path for coexisting peacefully with our fellows. Writ large, it is this tradition that has Jews in America singing the “Star Spangled Banner” while Jews in Britain sing “God Save the Queen”. However, there are limits to the Jewish version of “When in Rome...”

In Vayikra, we are warned against being seduced by the immorality of the nations. “Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: I am Hashem your God. Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled, and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you, and do not follow their traditions. Carry out My laws and safeguard My decrees to follow them; I am Hashem, your God. (18:1-4)

Rav Hirsch correctly hears the echoes of the opening of the Ten Commandments in these verses. As such, they clearly stand to reinforce the supreme importance of understanding that sexual morality is equal to acceptance of Hashem as our God. Without God and without morality there is nothing but emptiness, baseness, isolation and fear. With God, there is everything.

God makes the absolute statement of His presence. I am Hashem. I brought you out of Egypt to be your God. But it is still up to us to leave behind our animalistic ways and embrace that which is holy about our lives. How? By our actions; by what we choose to do and what we choose not to do. By observing the commandments given to us.

However, the context for embracing the gift of holiness that God holds out for us must be a more general moral

To be holy, is to do for others. To ignore self-interest is delusional. We must start with a healthy and developed self, whose psychological and physical needs are prioritized, but we strive to not stop there. We work to expand our definition of self, to care and help as many others as we can, aspiring to be as holy as humanly possible.

stance, one that allows us not only to “talk the talk” of God’s commandments but to also “walk the walk.” In short, we must reject the ways of Egypt and Canaan, leave behind the sordid ways of the past and shield ourselves from the lascivious ways of the future.

We suffered greatly in Egypt and we would be challenged mightily in Canaan. But what is it about Egypt and Canaan that could be such a fundamental threat to the future of the Jewish nation that God would hold their practices as example? Is there something specific and unique for us to guard ourselves against?

Actually, there are no specifics, per se. There is, instead, a general sense of morality, a context, a canvas upon which the specifics would come to be drawn. While there are no specifics, there is, however, a clear message, that it is incumbent on each and every Jew to turn away from the sexual deviance of the goyim.

When the Children of Israel were in the desert, these two nations – Egypt and Canaan – represented the most decadent nations on earth. Rashi tells us this directly, that these two nations are mentioned by name to teach that *maseiem shel Mitzrayim v’shel Ca’naanim mekulkalim mikol ha’umos* – the ways of these nations are the most abominable of all the nations.

In warning us to not follow the traditions of Egypt and Canaan, nations that were strong and defined by an ethos and culture, God’s lesson to us is powerful and direct. It is teaching us to never imagine that it is enough to simply avoid the acts that are most vulgar in these cultures, that refraining from these will protect you and you will uncorrupted by their “lesser sin”. It is teaching us that in a culture defined by abomination that there is no lesser sin!

By presuming “lesser sin” we have already trapped

ourselves in corrupted thinking. Lesser or “ordinary” sins inevitably and necessarily lead to more and dire sins, until one finds himself at the lowest depths of Egypt and Canaan. The train of immorality is an express train with no stops. Once out of the station, there is no getting off.

Think differently? Ask the one whose flirting has led to an affair, the one who shakes his head in self-disgust and confesses, “I never intended for it to end this way...” No, the destination is never intended at the outset but it is quickly reached just the same! It is for this reason that Rav Moshe Feinstein teaches that, “...one must totally avoid even the seemingly benign first steps of the decadent ways of Egypt or Canaan.”

Of course, in this regard Egypt and Canaan are not merely geographical places rooted in time. They are eternal lessons for us. Egypt is no longer a great civilization. Canaan no longer exists. And yet today, even here in the United States, decadence need not be “sought out”, it seeks to encroach in our lives at every turn. There is no physical wall large enough or strong enough to keep out the temptation. Egypt and Canaan is within every culture.

Only our will and the strength to remember, “I am Hashem...” Faith can strengthen us where walls and even logic cannot.

“U’bechukoseihem lo telechu.” And do not follow their traditions. It is interesting that “chukoseihem” is used both in regards to these base human behaviors and, l’havdil, about mitzvot, like parah aduma that are beyond our ability to rationally understand. Why do we perform such mitzvot? Not because they “make sense” to us but simply because God commanded us to!

Rav Shlomo Wolbe tells us that, “It is common for people to think that a nation’s culture is predicated upon a set of rational norms, and that any ‘civilized’ person must accept them, unless he is demented.” But that is not at all true. While cultures can embrace what is best in the human spirit, they can just as easily convey all that is decadent. Culture is simply an accumulation of practices, many of which are not in the least logical.

American “culture” is predicated on laws, freedom and liberty for all. These are values consistent with our own eternal teachings. But American culture also embraces a worldview which places the fullness of immorality at the fingertips of any person with a iPhone or computer. American culture and mores is both; it stands apart from the culture of the nation of Israel.

The difference then between the chukim of the nations

and our chukim has nothing to do with rationality; has nothing to do with rhyme or reason. The difference is, simply, that ours are God-given. They are never changing. But the world’s chukim are ever changing. Therefore, Rav Wolbe concludes that, “the Torah cautions us to avoid falling into the habit forming, mind molding trap of imitating the practices of alien societies.”

Ani Hashem elokeichem I am Hashem your God.

No human, rational or not, brilliant or dull, can overcome society’s immorality. It is futile to try. There is no “half-way” when it comes to morality. There are no “protections” that will allow you to engage in goyish culture “on your terms.” You have a frum home? Not enough. Your kids go to day school Az mah? You’re Orthodox? Doesn’t matter.

No, no, no! You argue that one can engage in the larger culture on your own terms. You have proof! You have texts! You cite the Talmud (Avoda Zarah 3a), “God does not test people in a way that they would not be able to withstand.”

Sadly, the “proof” is in the pudding. Look around yourself. Egypt and Canaan continue to overpower! We still see countless homes and marriages destroyed. Homes that were good, Jewish homes, filled with yiddishkeit. Once started, immorality is progressively more difficult to stop.

The only sure way to stop is to never start. Once our eyes see and our ears hear, it is impossible to un-see or un-hear.

Perhaps few experiences speak to the difficulty in overcoming immorality as the experience of young men and women who return to their college dorms after having spent a year or two in Israel, studying Torah. There, their lives were focused and pure. Their thoughts were on God and Torah.

At the conclusion of their study in Israel, they return to the United States, certain in their belief that their time in Israel has made them “different” people, more able to withstand the temptations of American college life.

How sad then to see the slow, and sometimes not so slow, erosion of that sacredness! How tragic to witness Jerusalem’s holiness lose out to the immorality of America’s Egypt and Canaan! It is a chok. It is not rational. You cannot “tell” yourself not to fall victim. Resistance, once immersed in the culture, is impossible.

I am Hashem your God. In that proclamation is the only protection from Egypt and Canaan. Just as God brought us out of Egypt to be our God, so too He brought us out of a culture of abomination and immorality to live a life of holiness and to be a light to the nations.

The Revolutionary Idea of Holiness

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In parashat Kedoshim, we encounter a revolutionary word and concept, which the Torah introduced to civilization.

In Vayikra 19:1-2, we read:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לְאֹמֹר, דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עֵדוּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם, קְדוֹשִׁים תְּהִיּוּ, כִּי קְדוֹשׁ, אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם,

And G-d spoke to Moses saying: Speak unto the entire community of the Children of Israel, and say unto them: "You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d am holy."

There is really no way to adequately translate the Hebrew word קְדוֹשׁ—kadosh. For those who truly seek to understand its profound inner meanings, learning Biblical Hebrew would be a wonderful first step—since, as I have often pointed out, studying Torah in translation is like kissing the bride through the veil. The word kadosh may be translated as holy, sacred, ethically-exalted, separate, and even—balanced.

The concept of kadosh, which is a uniquely Jewish concept, is certainly one of the greatest ethical and moral contributions that the Jewish people have made to humankind. Its essence is reflected throughout the contents of parashat Kedoshim, which calls for just, humane and sensitive treatment of all people: the aged, the handicapped and the poor. The worker is to be promptly paid, and the stranger is to be loved and welcomed into the community's midst. Vengeance and bearing a grudge are to be condemned. Significantly, when it comes to justice, no one, not even the most exalted or the most downtrodden, is to be favored.

There is, however, one aspect of holiness that is not easily recognizable or understood. In this week's parasha, we read the challenging verse, Leviticus 19:29: אַל תְּהַלֵּל אֶת בִּתְּךָ לְהַזְנוֹתָהּ, וְלֹא תִזְנֶה הָאֲרֶץ, וּמִלֹּאָה הָאֲרֶץ יִמָּה, Do not profane your daughter, to make her a harlot, lest the land become lewd, and the land become filled with depravity. As we have often noted, the ancient land of Canaan and the surrounding lands, were lands whose inhabitants practiced lewdness and depravity. It was a mighty struggle for the Jewish people to maintain a sense of balance, a sense of fairness and a sense of justice, let alone a sense of kedushah—holiness.

It was in this environment, that the Jews were called upon to live an exalted life, not to allow themselves to be influenced, and, certainly not to follow the customs and

practices of the local residents. Idolatry was not merely the senseless and innocent worship of sun, moon, stones or trees. It was, almost always, associated with unacceptable sexual perversions and even child sacrifice. In fact, the primary figures in the worship of the idolatrous cults at the temples were known as קְדוּשׁוֹת —k'day'shoht, ironically, women dedicated to the cult of holy prostitution.

In this ancient milieu, the Torah called out against the sexual exploitation of women for harlotry. No man may degrade his daughter under the guise of spiritual elevation. In fact, according to Rabbi Eliezer, cited in Talmud Sanhedrin 76a, this verse also forbids a father to "violate" his daughter by giving her in marriage to a much older man. Rabbi Akiva argues that in order to protect daughters from untoward temptation, fathers are obligated to arrange suitable marriages for their daughters as soon as they reach marriageable age.

These regulations are not to be treated lightly! The Torah boldly warns the people that the land of Israel itself is defiled by these sins, and that immoral behavior leads to the destruction of the land. The Torah depicts the land as if it is human, and that because the land itself is holy, it has a visceral reaction to sin and corruption. The land itself has a heart that beats and a soul that feels—and is profoundly repulsed by decadent behavior.

There is one significant final point that this particular Torah portion underscores. In the early 1970s, the psychiatrist Karl Menninger wrote an important book entitled "Whatever Became of Sin." A popular song at that time, sung by Debbie Boone, was "You Light Up My Life," in which one of the lines was, "How could it be wrong, if it feels so right?"

Let's face it, we humans have a very highly developed set of defense mechanisms that are frequently employed to justify even our most outrageous behavior. Over the decades, "Do your own thing," became the virtual mantra of contemporary life, provided there were no "innocent victims." As a result, two consenting adults may do whatever they please. While the 1970s was a time when everything and anything was subject to rationalization and justification—despite the short-lived return to the so-called "family values," a good part of those values remains with us today.

Unfortunately, contemporary social philosophers have labored assiduously to justify many undesirable practices. Two high profile contemporary rationalizations are the arguments used to justify pornography and prostitution—after all, consenting adults should be permitted to do whatever they please. In fact, it is argued, pornography and prostitution very much fit in with contemporary capitalist economic theory and philosophy. If a woman chooses to use her own body to “work” the market, or if men and women choose to pose for pornographic pictures and others are happy to pay for their product, it’s really little more than another way for “laborers” to earn a living within the free enterprise system.

Truth be told, in the general marketplace of ideas, there are really no effective rational arguments against prostitution and pornography, except perhaps to say that it leads to crime. This is why proponents argue that it’s time to legalize prostitution and pornography, and eliminate all motives for criminality. Indeed, opponents are hard-put to rebut these arguments.

The Torah, however, rejects both these practices by

introducing the startling and revolutionary concept called “holiness!” Unless society subscribes to the belief that a human being is “HOLY,” a reflection of the Divine, because the Lord our G-d is Holy, there is really no limit to the extent of depravity and immorality to which a human being may sink. There is no rational or justifiable reason to deny a woman her right to earn a living through prostitution, except to say that she is a reflection of the Divine, that human beings are holy, that the human body is sanctified, and that sexuality is a sacred gift from G-d.

Clearly, absent the idea of holiness, of kedusha, we homo sapiens are, in effect, reduced to mere animals, to limbs, heads, arms, legs and genitalia. Within the context of holiness, as set forth in the Torah, humans are regarded to be as exalted as the angels, comparable to Divine emanations of G-d, majestic creatures whose Divine function is to promote goodness, kindness, thoughtfulness, helpfulness, charity and justice.

This is Judaism at its best. This is Torah in its most exalted. It is to reach this exalted state that must be our greatest aspiration.

Virtual Vitality

Mrs. Shira Smiles (Adapted by Channie Koplowitz Stein)

Parshat Acharei Mot includes a verse often quoted as a source for Rabbinic decisions involving matters of life and death: “You shall observe chukotai/My decrees and mishpotai/My laws vechai bohem/and by which he shall live-I am Hashem.” Rashi comments on the phrase “and by which he shall live” as referring to *olam habo*, the future world, since we are all destined to die in this physical world. However, our Sages emphasize that the phrase is an affirmation of the importance of life, that in all matters, except for the three cardinal sins, where there is physical danger to life [or limb] when observing a Torah command, the sanctity of life takes precedence over the observance of the mitzvah. Are these two views, live in this world or live in the world of eternity, in total conflict, or can we reconcile these two views?

Rabbi Asher Weiss notes that even physical life can be experienced on multiple levels. For a Jew, living his life within the dictates of Torah values and mitzvot gives him the fullest life experience possible. Taking this idea one step further, Rabbi Tatz suggests that mitzvot create a

bridge between this world and the next. Man is composed of a physical body and a spiritual soul. With very few exceptions, mitzvot are physical actions. However, to be fully effective, one should perform the mitzvah with the proper intention/*kavannah* of acting for the sake of Heaven. Our minds, which control our thoughts and intentions, are part of our spiritual souls. Therefore, although we are performing a physical action, we are affecting our souls which will receive their reward in the future world where they will continue to exist after our physical death. The more intense our spiritual intention, the greater will our reward be in the eternal life of the soul.

The Slonimer Rebbe, the Netivot Shalom, proposes an even stronger connection between the world of physical performance and the world of the spirit. One can indeed perform all the mitzvot of the Torah punctiliously, and yet do them all by rote, investing no spirit, infusing them with no spark of life. If a Jew does not feel the joy of mitzvah observance, the exhilaration of Shabbat, for example, how will he enjoy being in the radiance of God’s

presence in the world of the soul? If he has not experienced the joy of God's presence in this world, he will not experience that joy in the eternal world. He will be, writes Rabbi Rabinowitz in Mesillot Bilvavam, like a blind man in an art gallery, unable to appreciate his surroundings.

The Netivot Shalom brings this point home by noting that our verse mentions *chukim* in addition to *mishpatim*. While we may understand the reasons for the *mishpatim*/social laws, *chukim* are those laws which we as human beings cannot logically understand. Nevertheless, we should invest the same joy and exuberance in performing all the *mitzvot*, whether we understand them or not, because they help us form a connection to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

When we are told, "And you shall live by them," we are being instructed to invest our hearts and entire being into the *mitzvah's* observance, writes the Osherover Rebbe in Be'er Moshe. Just as we cannot properly perform the *mitzvah* of the four species with a dried out *lulav*, instructs us the Gemorro, so should we not perform any *mitzvah* in a withering and "dead" mood. Why is the *lulav* specifically used to teach this idea? If we divide the four Hebrew letters of *lulav* into two words, we get *Lo lev/to Him* is the heart, and its numerical equivalent 68, the same as *chaim*/life. Hashem wants us to become alive and enthusiastic in our *mitzvah* observance. When you infuse the *mitzvot* with energy, you yourself are impacted and become more alive, adds Rabbi Rabinowitz, so that, although you will receive your reward in the world to come, your physical life on earth is impacted and rejuvenated as well.

How can we bring enthusiasm and life into our spiritual lives of *mitzvah* observance? Why is it so difficult? Rabbi Eisenberg gives us some insight into human psychology. Physical pleasure provides instant gratification, albeit the pleasure is short lived and demands constant refueling. This need overpowers our sensibilities, so that we may realize our actions are harmful even as we keep doing them, like overeating when we know we'll regret it later. Spiritual satisfaction, on the other hand is delayed gratification. It requires time, effort, and training. But its pleasure remains with you for extended periods of time, often forever. Further, the spiritual activities and venues that are fulfilling for one person are rarely the same as those for another person. Each of us must find our own calling, our own energy source to plug into what will spur us to have the patience and make the effort to grow. For one person, that

may be raising *tzedakah* for a worthy cause (or several), for another, it could be studying Torah and teaching, for yet another, it might be immersion in prayer especially for others, and yet for another, it might be cooking for families in need. Find the path that gives you pleasure in this world so that you can build on it for eternity.

Besides telling us to live by the *mitzvot*, the Torah also provides the parallel command to choose life. But life for a Jew is "not by bread alone, but by all that go forth from My mouth," says Hashem. Therefore, choosing life means not only physical life provided by bread, but especially spiritual life provided by observing the 248 negative commandments that correspond to the 248 limbs that comprise the human anatomy, writes Rabbi Rothberg in *Moda Labinah*. We can thus extrapolate that there is no life of the body without nourishment from the Torah. This explains why our *medrash* relates that Hashem held the mountain over Bnei Yisroel at Sinai like a dome, declaring, "If you do not accept the Torah, there will you be buried;" If you do not accept the Torah and abide by its 248 negative commands and its 365 positive commands, you will surely die, for you will have no sustenance for the soul that animates the body, explains Rabbi Sheinerman in *Ohel Moshe*.

We are all in God's service, but we can be compared to the servants of a human king (*lehavdil*). Some servants serve in the palace, in the king's inner circle. Others are in the distant reaches of his kingdom, performing perfunctory but necessary services, but seldom if ever in direct contact with the king. Which kind of *eved* Hashem do we want to be, asks the *Sifsei Chaim*, one who serves by rote, out of pure necessity, or one close to the King, One with Whom we can communicate on a personal level?

If Torah is our life, it is meant to be continuous, without interruption, not delegated only to specific times and hours, writes Rabbi Wolbe. During the course of our day, fill those empty minutes (waiting on line, riding in your car, walking, etc.) with Jewish thoughts, whether to review a Torah lesson, figure out how best to prepare for Shabbat or Yom Tov, or how to observe any *mitzvah*.

Western culture convinces us that the essential part of life is our profession, rather than our spiritual life. If that is the case, let us treat our Torah as a profession, writes the Tosher Rebbe in *Avodat Avodah*. As the *Nusach Sfar*d includes in the Prayers upon Arising, "Torah teheh *emunasi* ... /Let my faith be in Torah..." or, alternately

translated, “May the Torah be my profession...” Let us invest Torah and mitzvot with at least the same importance we invest in our professions. Let us identify ourselves as a servant of God, not only as a lawyer, sales rep, mechanic, or teacher. That’s why our verse of living by Torah ends in, “I am Hashem [spelled YKVK],” Signifying that if you make Torah your life and your identity, then I will interact with you as the God of compassion, even to the extent of annulling a negative decree. Further all the time and each step taken in preparation of a mitzvah is equally rewarded.

Rabbi Frand develops this idea more fully beginning with an analogy originally presented by Rav Hutner. In response to a question presented by one of his students, Rav Hutner explained that one was not living a double life by spending time practicing his profession while compartmentalizing another part of his life to Torah study. Instead, he was alternating living between two rooms in the same house. Expanding on this idea, Rabbi Frand then explains that even while living in the same house, one might be decorating one room elaborately while keeping another bare. Which room is he really living in? Is his time with Torah and mitzvot like his family room or like his garage, and which is his professional room? Does he identify with his Ivri Anochi, his Jewish identity, or his worldly identity? Just as you hopefully find a profession where you feel challenged, invigorated and fulfilled, find an area of Jewish life, whether individual or communal, that will equally challenge you but also invigorate and fulfill you. Let our children see us excited about something Jewish.

Is Anyone Ever Good Enough?

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week’s parsha, Parshas Achrei Mos, begins with the following pasuk (verse): And Hashem spoke to Moshe, after the deaths of the two sons of Aharon, when they came close to Hashem, and they died (Vayikra 16:1).

This pasuk is referring to an incident mentioned previously in Vayikra 10:1-7, Parshas Shemini, which outlines the sin, and subsequent sudden deaths, of Nadav and Avihu, the two eldest sons of Aharon Ha’Kohen.

The introduction to Pirkei Avot/Ethics of Our Fathers states, “Every Jew has a portion in olam habo/the future, eternal world. Rabbi Druck notes that the verse does not say that he will have a portion in the world to come, in the future tense, but that he already has it in the present. We are meant to create that experience now, in our physical lives. Certainly, all who support Torah will be rewarded in the future world, but if they themselves do not study Torah and perform the mitzvot, they will lose out on this experience, of the personal connection with Hakodosh Boruch Hu while they are still alive. When we are involved in doing a mitzvot, adds Rabbi Yoffe in Leovdecha B’Emet, we are already bringing the holiness of that future world of Gan Eden into the physical world and surrounding ourselves in that aura and atmosphere. We can already live the future world in this physical world.

In a profound idea, Rabbi Schwab suggests that we are not to view this world and olam habo as two separate entities, but rather as one continuous life, the only difference being that the physical aspect of our lives have fallen away while the spiritual aspect of our lives continues. As the blessing before reading the Torah says, “Hashem has implanted eternal life within us.” With our study and observance of Torah and mitzvot, we are planting the seeds for our eternal life during our physical time on earth. These seeds grow and bear fruit both in this world and in olam habo. Life is a continuum from the moment we are born into the physical world through the eternal world of the soul.

On the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, in their religious ecstasy and fervor, the sons of Aharon each took a fire pan, put in it fire and ketores (incense) and entered the Kodosh Kodashim (Holy of Holies), offering a foreign fire that G-d had not commanded them to offer. Immediately, a Divine fire emanated and consumed their souls, and they died.

Their precise sin is difficult to discern, and on the textual level, we are told that they came close and offered

אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוְּהָ, אֵשׁ זָרָה--אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוְּהָ, a foreign fire that they were not commanded (Vayikra 10:1). However, Chazal offer a number of different explanations of their sin, and subsequent deaths. The Da'as Zekeinim (Vayikra 16:1) quotes Medrash Vayikra Rabbah:

בחוריו אכלה אש ובתולותיו לא הוללו. למה בחורי בני אהרן אכלה אש? לפי שבתולות לא הוללו שהרי כמה בתולות נאות יושבות עגונות וממתנות להם, והם אמרו אחי אבינו מלך אבינו כהן גדול אחי אמנו נשיא אנחנו סגני כהונה! אי זו אשה ההוגנת לנו?! ולכן לא נשאו ומתו בלא בנים.

“Fire consumed His young men, and His maidens had no marriage celebration (Tehillim 78:63). Why were the sons of Aharon consumed by fire? Because the young women had no marriage celebrations. For there were many pleasant young maidens who were sitting and waiting for them (for a marriage proposal), and yet, they said, “The brother of our father (Moshe) is a king, our father is the Kohen Gadol, the brother of our mother (Nachshon ben Aminadav) is a prince, and we are deputy kohanim! What woman would possibly be appropriate for us!?” And so, they did not marry and died childless.”

It is worth quoting the powerful words and teaching of R' Yissochor Frand, and here I quote R' Frand verbatim:

“This [teaching about Nadav and Avihu not marrying because they deemed no girl good enough for them] is a frightening thought to contemplate considering the state of the ‘shidduch market’ today. I deal with many eligible young men, and I can tell you that many of them are honestly trying their hardest to find a mate, and they just have not been zocheh to find the right one expeditiously.

“Let’s be honest though: many young men nowadays are too picky and petty in their search for a shidduch. There are boys out there who think that the girl they will marry has to be perfect: She has to be beautiful, come from a wealthy family with perfect yichus, she has to have a great personality, and the lists go on ad nauseam. This type of boy meets girl after girl, and none of them can possibly meet every single one of his expectations, so he rejects them all.

“In a society in which we have become used to our cars being perfect, and our coffee being served up exactly right, young people grow up thinking that their spouses will also be perfect. But people are not perfect. Everyone has areas in which they need to improve.

“If there is any message that we must take from Nadav and Avihu’s tragic passing, it’s that we must stress to our single young men and women (and their parents) that they need to be humble enough to look for a shidduch that is appropriate for them, and not wait for Mr. or Miss Perfect to come along” (The Power of a Vort, p. 199-200).

In regard to children being rejected from schools, R' Aharon Leib Shteinman zt'l famously declared,

“Gayvah, gayvah, gayvah (It is from haughtiness that these children are rejected)! With the criteria that some schools are setting up today, even Avraham Avinu couldn’t get accepted to a ‘good’ school! After all, he was the son of Terach, an idol merchant!

“Rivka Imainu would definitely have trouble getting accepted as well, with Besuel for a father and Lavan for a brother! Let’s not forget that Besuel had poison readily available to kill Eliezer; they probably didn’t have to send Lavan to the drugstore to pick up a dose! Who knows how many other people he killed with the poison at his disposal!

“And our Imahos, Rachel and Leah, daughters of Lavan the swindler, wouldn’t get accepted either. In fact, a good portion of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs wouldn’t be able to get into our schools today!

“In Brisk, when I was growing up, there was one central cheder for those who wanted an authentic Jewish education. Everyone learned there - from the children of the Brisker Rav to the children of the simple craftsmen, laborers, and even Communists - we all learned Torah together” (Reb Aharon Leib, p.152).

There are many lessons to be learned from the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu. Yet let us all carefully read and learn the words of R' Frand, as they relate to our society today. If no one is ever good enough, how and who will our children marry; if no child or family is good enough, to what schools will our precious children go?

Would we have been meshadech with the families of Avraham, Rivka, Rachel and Leah...? Would we have accepted the son of Terach the idolator into our schools...?

May we be graced with the wisdom to know that while there is no such thing as “perfect” in the eyes of fellow man (for we are humans and not angels), we are all beloved and perfect to the RS”O. If we are good enough for Him, should we not be good enough for each other?