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Blind Spots

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered April 22, 1972)

One of the most morally significant verses in a Sidra full of ethical and religious majesty, is the commandment *לפני עור לא תתן מכשול*, “thou shalt not place a stumbling block before a blind man.”

That literalist and fundamentalist sect of the Second Commonwealth, the Sadducees, accepted this verse in an exclusively literal fashion (Nid. 57). The Torah, they maintained, means only what it says and nothing more: one must not trip the blind man.

However, the Pharisees – the Fathers of the Talmud – expanded the verse to include moral ensnarement as well as physical entrapment. One who is a *מחטיא*, one who causes others to sin, stands in violation of the commandment of *לפני עור*, of putting a stumbling block before the blind. Thus, to use the classical Talmud example, one violates this commandment if he is a *מושיט לו כוס של יין לנזיר*, if he hands or makes available a cup of wine to the Nazirite, one who had taken an oath not to drink any intoxicating liquors.

What the Rabbis mean to tell us is that no one is perfect. Everyone has “blind spots.” Fortunate is the man who is sophisticated enough to realize that he has such blind spots, even if he does not know what they are. Woe to the man who lives by the myth of perfection, and assumes that he is all-seeing and all-knowing. Such blind spots should not be abused and exploited.

The Sifra expanded the concept to include not only moral blind spots, but personal and psychological ones as well – to use the language of the Sifra, *לפני סומא בדבר*, one must not place a stumbling block before one who is blind in a particular respect. Thus the Sifra illustrates this point, if one approaches you and says *בת פלוני מהי לכהונה*, is such and such young woman an appropriate match for this man, אל תאמר לו כשרה והיא אינה, either halakhically or personally,

אלא פסולה, do not say she is qualified, when in fact she is not. For then you will be taking advantage of blindness of a man in a particular respect. Or, another example: *היה נוטל ממך עצה אל תתן לו עצה שאינה הוגנת לו*, if one comes to consult you about a personal or business matter, give him advice which, to your full knowledge, is the right one for him. Do not counsel him to do something which you, in your heart, know will not be fully to his benefit.

Thus, the precept of *לפני עור* run the entire gamut of human experience as a halakhic-moral principle. To discourage someone from something he can attain, is to transgress the prohibition of placing a stumbling block before a man who is blind. Conversely, to encourage someone to something that he is not fit for, or not yet fit for, or no longer suitable for, is to abuse his blind spot: *לפני סומא בדבר*.

In fact, the Rabbis invoked this concept of *לפני סומא בדבר* in any act which incites or provokes another to retaliation. We are told (M.K. 16a) that the maid-servant of the house of R. Judah the Prince – herself quite a scholar – put a man into excommunication when she noticed that he struck his adult son. What is the reason for placing the ban on him – a ban so approved by the Rabbi that they refused to remove it for three years? The maid-servant explained: the father is in violation of *לפני עור*, because by striking a mature son, he provokes him to strike the father back – and that is a violation of a Biblical prohibition punishable by death. The father thus abuses the blind spot of the son’s anger, and is in violation of this great commandment.

What the Rabbis meant to say is that to infantilize an adult, to treat a mature and competent persona as if he were a mere youngster, is to distort and wreck human relations and to incite unpleasantness, and hence is a violation of this moral norm.

It is only right to apply this precept to the State of Israel, whose Independence Day we have just this week celebrated. I see the concept of stumbling blocks and blind spots as relevant in a broader sense, less technically halakhic.

There are two kinds of blind spots that American Jews have with regard to Israel. There are those who view Israel only in a materialistic fashion – its military security, its social peace, its financial well-being. For them Israel is defined by the UJA, Bonds, tourism, and General Dayan's latest pronouncements. Of religion, faith, the covenant which binds Jewish people throughout the world to the Land of Israel – of this they know nothing.

There are others who are blind in the other eye. For them, all of Israel is a question of supporting and enhancing yeshivot, kollelim, religious schools, mikvaot, and charitable institutions for the religious groups. They act as if 1948 never took place, as if military security were not an overwhelming problem, as if the financial well-being of the entire State had no relationship to the survival of the Torah institutions. They are blind too.

The danger is that if we overlook either element, the spiritual or the material, and play to either weakness, we place a stumbling block before סומא בדבר, before such blind spots, and thus jeopardize all of Israel and all of the Jewish people.

The great danger is that unless Jews of the Diaspora are alert both to the body and the soul of Israel, we will lose out both in the physical and spiritual realms.

It is concerning this dual problem that I believe it appropriate to relate to you – a nightmare. It is something the great Israel novelist and Nobel laureate, Sh. Y. Agnon, of blessed memory, wrote in one of his famous novels (תמול שלשום) many years ago. Agnon tells of Yitzhak Kumer, a young lad from a Galician shtetl, who was overcome with feelings for Zion and made his long trek from the poverty of Galicia to the equally grinding poverty of Palestine in the days before Tel Aviv existed. Kumer then becomes one of the partially employed inhabitants of Jaffa. There his poverty continues, but his style of life changes. He loses the religion of his fathers, and becomes another one of the early workers who built up the State of Israel. However, at one point he decides to turn to Jerusalem, and with that comes the return to his ancestral faith. Slowly, he begins to rehabilitate himself spiritually. He begins to lay the tefillin, to pray the מנחה, to say the ברכת המזון. And in

the crisis of religious return, Yitzhak Kumer has a dream. It is this: he is running, and he does not know for sure what it is that he is fleeing. But he is panic-stricken. And in his headlong flight, he loses his shoes and then his hat. He sees a place to which to escape – a little synagogue on the second story which can be reached only by grasping a fire-escape ladder and entering through the window. He proceeds to do this in his desperate flight, climbs the ladder, plunges in through the open window. Thereupon, the window shuts close right on him. And there he remains – bare-headed within, barefoot without.

I take this nightmare as symbolic of the forebodings of Agnon – and all of us – about the possible disasters that may afflict our people. Our danger is that we may remain bareheaded, בגילוי ראש, within our inner lives, our spiritual and religious lives, will be bereft of any of the sacred and traditional values that have long graced our people. At the same time, we live under the threat of economic and material disasters – of remaining barefoot, deprived shoes and clothing, without, i.e., in the realm of economics and physical survival.

Agnon is warning us against both blind spots – the blind spot of the secularist who does not understand that as a people we cannot continue and cannot survive if we are bareheaded within; and of the religionist, who does not understand that the cruel world in which we live, and in the circumstances which history has spun out for us, we cannot be barefoot without, walking humbly and begging for crumbs from the tables of strangers. We simply cannot remain that way, half in shul, and half out of shul, bareheaded and barefoot, bereft spiritually and deprived materially.

As we begin the 25th year of Israel's independence, we must express our concern for both realms and resolve to continue in both areas in our active support and assistance for the State of Israel. We shall not and must not allow ourselves to be tripped because of either blind spot.

And in this firm resolve and determination, we must also understand that fulfillment of לפני עור לא תתן מכשול, in this expanded sense, should be taken not only passively and negatively – that of not tripping up a man who is blind, or that of merely not being blind; but we must be activists and positively and constructively see that we shall, to the best of our ability, remove the blindness from our people, and enhance their foresight.

It is this note upon which I would like to conclude – that this extended meaning of “*Thou shalt not place a stumbling*

block before the blind man,” is meant to encourage us towards an active development of sight as well as a negative refraining from injuring one who is blind in a particular area.

The ברכות השחר, the morning blessings, are today recited all consecutively in the synagogue at the beginning of the service. However, originally each blessing was recited at a different point in the process of getting up and getting dressed. When did one recite the blessing of ... ברוך אתה ה' פוקח עורים, “Blessed art Thou O Lord ... who makes the blind see?”

There are two גירסאות or versions. In the Baraita we read: כי פתח עיניו, when a man opens his eyes he makes a blessing of פוקח עורים. However, the reading of Alfasi is כי מחא ידיה על עיניו, when he puts his hands to his eyes, i.e., he rubs his

eyes upon awakening. Maimonides too follows Alfasi and declares that the blessing פוקח עורים, “Who makes the blind see,” should be recited כשמעביר ידיו על עיניו, when he rubs his eyes.

It is not enough merely to see. It is not adequate merely to open one’s eyes. One does not fulfill his moral stature by not tripping the blind man and looking ahead himself. He has to do more than that. One must act, one must be מעביר ידיו על עיניו, he must put his hands to his eyes, i.e., he must open his eyes actively in order to avoid the pitfalls. He must transform sight into vision, and seeing into doing.

Only then do we achieve true moral fulfillment. For then we have imitated God, and like Him we are פוקח עורים, we make the blind see.

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Leadership and the Scapegoat

Dr. Erica Brown

One of the most unusual rituals in the entire book of Leviticus is found in this week’s Torah reading, Achrei Mot. Aaron is commanded to take two male goats and place lots upon them as a means of expiation. One goat was to be sacrificed, and the other, the mysterious Azazel, was to be sent off into the wilderness.

Aaron shall take the two he-goats and let them stand before God at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; and he shall place lots upon the two goats, one marked for God and the other marked for Azazel. Aaron shall bring forward the goat designated by lot for God, which he is to offer as a sin offering; while the goat designated by lot for Azazel shall be left standing alive before God, to make expiation with it and to send it off to the wilderness for Azazel. (Lev. 16:7-10)

The word ‘ez’ in Hebrew is a goat, and ‘azal’ is to be gone, making the goat in this conjunction an animal that has been banished. Rashi explains that the word ‘Azazel’ is a compound of the Hebrew for strong and mighty. He also cites the Talmud, which states that the word means a ‘precipitous and flinty rock’ (BT Yoma 67b), implying that the goat should meet its death by being cast off a rough, mountainous cliff. The sages of the Talmud interpret our verses to mean that the goats should be as equal in size and appearance as possible (BT Hullin 11a).

Maimonides, in his “Laws of Repentance,” explains that on Yom Kippur, the High Priest confessed for the sins of all of Israel on this goat, the severe and non-severe

transgressions, those that are intentional and those that are not intentional and then sent the goat away (1:2). Maimonides also adds an important qualifier: this ritual only worked to atone for certain wrongdoings if the people themselves repented. This unusual goat could not magically carry away sins if those committing them felt neither agency nor determination to change.

This ancient rite had important and potent symbolism for those cleansing themselves of sin. The effects of sin can be crippling. It can lead people to internalize that they are only the sum total of the wrongs they have ever done. Wrongdoing can make people label themselves as unworthy and lead to a downward psychic spiral of behavior. Externalizing sin and having it be symbolically marched far away into the wilderness may have had a liberating impact, allowing people to begin truly healing themselves. Wilderness is the perfect location for the goat; it represents a tangle of uncertainty, fear, danger, loss, and risk. Wilderness is a place of both disequilibrium and freedom. Sending this goat into the physical wilderness may have allowed the High Priest and those he prayed for to imagine that all the internal chaos of sin fled far away, leaving them cleansed with a sense of returned order and a renewed sense of their own goodness.

This fascinating ritual also gave birth to the word ‘scapegoat’ – someone who is blamed for the mistakes or faults of others, often unfairly, to relieve others of

responsibility. When we blame others, we remove the burden of accountability from ourselves. Yet its use today in common parlance is the exact opposite of its ancient meaning, according to Maimonides. The goat was there to help make sin visible and pronounced to all of Israel; it worked as a symbol only when the community was committed to change.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his book *Judaism's Life-Changing Ideas*, describes the perils of a scapegoat mentality: "It happens whenever a society feels that something is badly amiss, when there is a profound cognitive dissonance between the way things are and the way people think they ought to be. People are then faced with two possibilities. They can either ask, 'What did we do wrong?' and start to put it right, or they can ask, 'Who did this to us?' and search for a scapegoat."

The scapegoat is a common hazard in leadership. Leaders who don't want to take responsibility for problems within their organizations commonly look around for people and conditions to blame. Suket Gandhi, in his blog "Beware the Rise of Scapegoat Leaders" (April 17, 2016) writes that "Scapegoat Leaders" are quick to blame others for their own shortcomings and their inability to achieve expected outcomes. "These leaders have the mindset of finding a scapegoat for everything that has not gone well so that they can protect themselves." He claims the tribe of scapegoats keep growing and says that the expression 'scapegoat leader' is itself an oxymoron: "A scapegoat is a

victim, and a leader cannot have a victim complex."

Leaders can also become scapegoats for much deeper systemic issues that boards or administrators do not want to acknowledge or treat. Roberto Motta in "Are You a Leader or a Scapegoat?" (*Medium*, Sept. 19, 2015), describes what happens when companies identify a scapegoat for their problems: "The catharsis achieved by firing the unsuccessful company executive serves the important function of bringing relief to the people who remain in the organization, as well as hope that things will improve." It also reinforces "everyone's belief in individual action." These people were fired because they did not do enough. If you work harder and better, you will not be fired. But, in reality, those who are truly guilty for the health and well-being of an organization are not identified or punished. They can then seize control of the chaos for their own ends. The factors contributing to organizations' problems are ignored.

The scapegoat of the Hebrew Bible was meant to achieve the very opposite of what scapegoating does today. It was the High Priest himself who was charged with confessing on the day and sending the goat away. In full view of his community, the High Priest took responsibility for his sins, those of his household, and for those of all of Israel. When he intoned the words, he understood his responsibility as the leader to own his sins and those of his flock.

So, who and what have you blamed for your mistakes?

A Tree in the Forest

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z"l

In this week's parsha we are commanded, "*With righteousness shall you judge your friend*" (Vayikra 19:15). Rashi explains that this verse is to be understood, first of all, in a literal sense, but also as a directive to judge our friend toward the scale of merit, as the Talmud tells us. This directive is more commonly known as giving the benefit of the doubt. Exactly what it entails is the subject of a dispute among medieval halachic authorities, but most follow the opinion that, when dealing with a person who is known to be righteous in his behavior, we must judge even acts that he does which appear to be of a questionable nature as being done in accordance with halacha.

Rabbi Dovid Kronglass, who was the masgchiach

ruchani, or spiritual adviser, of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, asked, how can we be required to think in a way that is counter - logical. If all appearances lead us to the conclusion that the person we are observing is, in fact, transgressing the Torah, why should we be required to assume against our own reason that, in actuality, he is acting properly? Rabbi Kronglass himself answers that the Torah wishes to inculcate within us a sympathetic intellect, one that looks upon others with kindness rather than with strictness. I would like to offer a different explanation, in light of a prohibition contained in the immediately following verse of the Torah.

The words immediately following the command to judge our friend with righteousness, in the next verse, are

“You shall not go about gossiping among your people” (Vayikra 19:16). One may ask, why should it be forbidden to speak disparagingly about other people, if what one is saying happens to be true. On the contrary, it should be considered a mitzvoh to inform someone of what his friend is really like, to correct any wrong impression that he has. Withholding information about the person, it would seem, can only be misleading. Why, then, is there a prohibition to gossip, to spread reports about other people?

Rabbi Yochanon Zweig, Rosh Yeshiva in Miami Beach, explained that the perception we have of a person actually defines the reality of that person for us. If someone tells us bad things about that person, he is destroying that reality. It is in this sense that the Talmud says that *leshon hora*, evil talk, kills three - the one who speaks it, the one who accepts it, and the one of whom it is spoken. Since the person’s reality is shaped by the way people perceive him to be, spreading evil talk about him changes that perception and thus changes his reality both in regard to himself and in regard to all those involved in spreading the gossip.

Rabbeinu Yonah, in his *Sha’arei Teshuvoh*, or Gates of Repentance, writes that as part of the teshuvoh process, we need to examine all of our deeds, including the mitzvos that we did, to see if there was anything lacking in our performance of them. While doing so can be very helpful in correcting one’s behavior and personality, it can also be taken to an extreme and lead one to overly negative feelings

about himself. As a kind of corrective to negative feelings that may arise as a result of introspection, Rav Nachman of Bratslav taught that one should also examine his failings, his transgressions, for any traces of good hidden within them. The rabbis tell us that if we see a Torah scholar performing a transgression at night, we can assume that by the next day, he repented for it. When one repents out of love for God, the rabbis further tell us, his transgressions are counted as merits. Perhaps the idea behind this is that if the transgression that he performed led to repentance and a closer relationship with God, then there must have been some element of good in the original act.

Based on our analysis, we can understand the predominant opinion among halachic authorities that when we see an otherwise righteous person perform an act that appears to be forbidden, we need to examine the act and try to interpret in a positive way. The reason for this, perhaps, is that in all likelihood there is some positive element in that act. Our interpretation of the act in this way thus actually defines the nature of the act as far as our perception of the one performing it is concerned. Following Rabbi Zweig’s explanation of the dynamics of *leshon hora*, our perception of this person actually defines his reality for us. Judging a person on the scale of merit, therefore, does not constitute a distortion of reality, but, rather, a view of reality that focuses on the positive aspects of the person we are observing.

Kedusha For Everyone

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given on Apr 28, 2022)

At the beginning of this week’s parsha, it says *Daber el kol adas Bnei Yisroel ve-amarta aleihem kedoshim tih’yu*—speak to all the congregation of Bnei Yisroel and tell them *kedoshim tih’yu*. Most of the time, when the Torah says *Daber el Bnei Yisroel ve-amarta aleihem*, it doesn’t say *kol adas Bnei Yisroel*. And Rashi comments that this has to do with the entire parsha. He says this was *ne’emar be-Hakhel* because *rov gufei Torah t’luyim ba*—since Parshas Kedoshim summarizes so many mitzvos of the Torah. It’s jam-packed with mitzvos parallel with the aseres ha-dibros and many other Parshios in the Torah. And Moshe wanted to ensure no one would miss all these mitzvos—a very practical reason. However, many of the Achronim gave a more philosophical explanation. Unlike Rashi, they explain the phrase *kol adas Bnei Yisroel*,

as related *avka* to the pasuk: *Daber el Bnei Yisroel ve-amarta aleichem, kedoshim tih’yu*. The Torah says something unique here: *Kedoshim Tih’yu*.

Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that if you would say don’t eat pigs, don’t work on Shabbos, don’t steal, it would mean that all of us should not eat pork or work on Shabbos or steal. But *Kedoshim Tih’yu* means to be holy. Being holy means to strive for *ruchnious* inside—not just to keep the rules and to be good religious citizen. It means to have a *she’ifa* inside—to emulate Hashem and be close to Him, *ki Kadosh Ani Hashem Elokeichem*. However, what do people say? *Kedoshim Tih’yu??* That’s for those kinds of people. It’s for the *ba’alei madreiga*, for the *tzadikim*, etc. That’s not talking about regular people like us. It’s enough for us not to work and drive on Shabbos, not

to steal, and not to eat pork. Therefore, Rav Hirsch says: No, I don't mean tzadikim and yechidei segula—that only the elite should be kedoshim. Everyone should strive for it on their madreiga, whatever stage they are up to. Every Jew—*kol adas Bnei Yisroel*. No one is merely a worker bee, leaving kedusha for the elite. Every Jew on their level must strive for kedusha, connect with Hashem, find their derech to ruchnious, and not just be a mediocre Jew while the Rosh Yeshiva can have his ruchnious.

Chasam Sofer takes this in a slightly different direction. He quotes the gemara that *Kedoshim Tih'yu* means *p'rushim tih'yu*—separate yourselves. He says that someone could easily make a mistake. What does it mean to be holy and to be separate? Have you ever seen a Guru in India who goes to the top of the mountain, or a hermit in the desert? Or you lock yourself away in a monastery, someplace. You might come to a mistaken *hava amina* that *Kedoshim Tih'yu* means to separate yourself from everyone else. Because everyone else will drag me down, and interacting with them will only distract me. Let me be a hermit and separate myself from the rest of Klal Yisroel—and then I can really be *kadosh u'parush!* And the Chasam Sofer says,

“no!” That is why Moshe said *Daber el kol adas Bnei Yisroel* to be *kedoshim*—not *kol yechidei Bnei Yisroel*. Hashem doesn't want us to be kadosh hermits. He wants us to be an *Am Kadosh* together. And Klei Yakar points out that technically, we can only be kadosh together because *dvarim she-be-kedusha* require other people. A hermit cannot be kadosh. Only someone in a kehila can have *dvarim she-be-kedusha*. Hashem is not interested in separating yourselves to see how holy you can be by not being with other people. Instead, we must come together and mechazek each other to be kadosh. We can push each other, share our she'ifos, and build something together. And that way, we can become an *Am Kadosh*. And I think that both pshatim are truly relevant. Your yetzer hara tells you, “I am not such a tzadik”—therefore, I don't have to be kadosh. No! Hashem wants every one of us to be kadosh. And how do we all become kadosh? *Kol adas Bnei Yisroel*. When we all come together, *be-dibuk chaveirim*, working together as one kehila. And with the right communal goals, we can all mechazeik each other and be an *Am Kadosh la-Hashem Elokeinu*, which is exactly what Hashem wants from us.

Love without Fear

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The parsha describes the service of the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur. Specifically, Moshe tells Aharon the proper protocol for entering the kodesh hakodashim. The parsha begins, though, with an unusual introduction: “Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon when they came improperly before Hashem (into the kodesh hakodashim) and died” (Vayikra 16:1). Why did the Torah mention the death of Aharon's sons in this context?

Simply speaking, the reason is that Aharon's sons died because they entered the Mishkan inappropriately. Thus, Hashem is telling Aharon to be careful when he goes into the inner sanctum on Yom Kippur. Chassidus, though, always likes to take a deeper approach. The Shem Mishmuel addresses the core problem of the entry of Aharon's sons. What is the message to Aharon and the other kohanim gedolim who follow him regarding entering the kodesh hakodashim on Yom Kippur?

Chassidus takes a positive view of Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon who entered the inner sanctum

of the Mishkan and were consumed by a heavenly fire. Chassidus does not consider them wicked people; after all, Moshe himself informed Aharon Hakohen of their death in a positive way. Hashem had told Moshe previously, “*Bikrovai ekadeish*. I will be sanctified with those close to Me” (Vayikra 10:3). Moshe told Aharon that his two dead sons had been holy people. They were very close to Hashem. Rashi there amplifies this, writing that Moshe said that Nadav and Avihu were even greater than himself and Aharon. “I had a prophetic awareness that there would be a sanctification of God's name at the dedication ceremony, that someone would give his life in a sacrificial way. I thought it would be either me or you, but now I see it was your sons. They must have been greater than we are.”

We must therefore understand the nature of their error in a deeper way. It can't be a simple sin. But our Sages do mention various sins, and the Torah itself mentions an *eish zara*, a strange fire. Let us understand the story of Nadav and Avihu in a deeper, more exalted way.

The Epicenter of God's Love

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Nadav and Avihu entered the kodesh hakodashim on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. This is the same place that Aharon entered on Yom Kippur at the climax of that day's avoda. As we have discussed before, every place in the world represents a certain spiritual energy.

One of the most important spiritual energies is the energy of love, *ahava*. God's love for the world, and especially for His children the Jewish People, is the root energy of creation. According to the Arizal, God created the world as an act of love; *olam chesed yibaneh* (Tehillim 89:3). Someone who feels love wants to bestow goodness on his beloved. Since Hashem loves people, and especially His Jewish People, He gives support and sustenance to them. To the Jewish People He gave the additional gift of Torah. At the core, everything that exists stems from God's love.

This fundamental midda also finds its expression in a physical place. There are places in the world where God's love is more concentrated than in other places. All of the energies God created have concentrations in three areas: place, time, and people. These energies sometime conflict with each other. For example, the energy of love conflicts with the energy of fear and constriction. In various places, each energy has a stronger presence. The love of Hashem for people has a place where it is expressed more strongly than in any other place. In this place, we find the epicenter of Hashem's love for the Jewish People.

The pasuk states, "The palace of the King Shlomo, is made of wood ... silver ... gold ... and beautiful curtains. Inside, it is full of love for the daughters of Jerusalem" (Shir Hashirim 3:9-10). Rashi explains that this "inside" refers to the kodesh hakodashim. Love is expressed in the form of the aron, keruvim, and luchos. The inner sanctum, the kodesh hakodashim, is the place where Hashem's love for Israel is most strongly expressed and felt.

In the whole world, we find a combination of God's love and God's justice. We live with this back-and-forth dialectic all the time. There are positive and negative mitzvos, which bid us to act or, alternatively, to refrain from action. The Ramban explains that when we do positive mitzvos, like shaking a lulav and putting on tefillin, we show our love for Hashem. When we refrain from doing the actions prohibited by mitzvos lo sa'asei, we express fear and respect. We live with *ahava* and *yira* all the time.

In the Beis Hamikdash, there are many restrictions. The kohanim and levi'im have to be careful to avoid any tuma, and there are many other regulations concerning the Temple service. However, once the kohen gadol enters the kodesh hakodashim, he is engulfed by the pure love of God. This is the meaning of the pasuk that the "inside" is full of love.

The Love of Reb Levi Yitzchak

The Shem Mishmuel quotes an intriguing statement from his grandfather, the Kotzker Rebbe. Someone asked him: Why did the first generation of Chassidic masters seem to be completely engulfed with love, the midda of *ahava*? They were loyal to their teacher, the Ba'al Shem Tov. These students felt a tremendous love among themselves, and they all got along well. Yet just two generations later, the Chassidic movement experienced many schismatic arguments and disputes between Rebbes and between their Chassidim. What changed?

The Kotzker repeated and strengthened the question. The Ba'al Shem Tov's soul was pure love. He loved Hashem with all his might, and he loved Jews passionately, too. What changed in just two generations that the Chassidim fell back into the old patterns of fighting? What happened to the love that the Ba'al Shem Tov wanted his followers to have for each other? Even today, we still have this troublesome problem. Could we say that the Ba'al Shem Tov was a failure, that he did not succeed in vanquishing the forces of strife?

The Kotzker gave an intriguing answer. One follower of the Ba'al Shem Tov was the famous Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. He loved Hashem with all of his might and passion, and he loved Jews with the same level of passion. He displayed boundless love for every Jew in the world. On Yom Kippur night, he would crawl under the benches from one end of the shul to the other. Nobody knew what he was doing. He looked like he was searching for chametz. After crawling through the entire synagogue, he would walk up to the bima and proclaim, "Hashem, I am looking for the drunkards. The goyim celebrate their new year with drinking. And here we are celebrating with teshuva and prayer! There are no drunkards here. See how holy are Your people!"

The Kotzker said, "Because Reb Levi Yitzchak displayed so much love and forgiveness, he opened up the heavenly gates of the room of love, *sha'ar ha'ahava*. This may be the highest level from which God started the act of creation.

Since Reb Levi Yitzchak had such an uncompromising love for Israel, he was able to get the keys and open up that treasure of Hashem's love for Israel."

Chassidus teaches a special principle. Energies come into the world from heaven to the Jewish People for the betterment of the world. If the Jewish People at the time of the Ba'al Shem Tov would have accessed the torrent of love, sweetness, and goodness with Torah and channeled it into the rest of the world, we would have a world without war. We would feel peace, tranquility, and love for our fellow human beings every moment of our lives.

The Kotzker explained there was indeed a small group of Jews like Reb Levi Yitzchak, but many other Jews did not get this message. They were busy arguing about who was better and engaging in *sinas chinam*, unjustified fights. Reb Levi Yitzchak had his followers, but most Jews did not agree with him. With the power of his love and devotion, Reb Levi Yitzchak opened up the gates of love in heaven, but the rest of the Jewish people did not take that energy and use it.

Since those energies were not used for good by Jews applying them through Torah, the energies were diverted. This flow then went to the other nations. The other nations don't have the special and sweet nature of the Jews. So when this flow went to the other nations, it produced a bad form of love. This was the beginning of the Romantic era. It was a time during which all the previous taboos about the values of modesty, love, and intimacy, which Christianity had brought to the world from Judaism, disintegrated.

For many centuries, intimacy was a topic not to be discussed openly in public. This taboo fell apart in poems and plays. It began to permeate the whole culture. Today, we see a world awash in immorality. We see the degenerate media and literature. It is so much worse today than ever before, and we struggle with that.

All of this is a distortion of the pristine and exalted concept of love. The relationship between man and woman should be holy, a God-like relationship. Had the Jewish People accepted the vision and mission that Reb Levi Yitzchak wanted for them, the world would have been different. But, unfortunately, most Jews didn't follow his ways of channeling Hashem's love for Israel to the rest of the world. Instead of this power going towards holiness, it went into *tuma*, defilement. If the Godly energy doesn't find its place in some good place, it bounces off and finds its place among evil, because spiritual energy is

never wasted. If it is not used properly, it does not simply dissipate—it goes towards evil.

When the other tzaddikim saw that this was going on, they decided to close the gates of love. They chose to stop following this path of Reb Levi Yitzchak and the Ba'al Shem Tov, which was to feel and express unbridled and unlimited love. They chose rather to return to the old-time parochialism. They hoped to thereby reduce the power that was being delivered to the side of evil.

This is an important idea. Unbridled love has tremendous power. It is the power that serves as the foundation of creation. But the source of creation can, unfortunately, be used in the wrong way as well.

Love Needs Boundaries

Nadav and Avihu were tremendous tzaddikim. Love of Hashem was their consuming passion. They thought and felt that they could enter the *kodesh hakodashim*, since Hashem had ordained that they build the Mishkan as the place to ensconce the love of Hashem for His people. Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest Jew ever, lived among them. This was the time for love without limits. They felt that their generation was ready for unbridled love. They would use the love of the *kodesh hakodashim* only for good. They felt no evil could come from this, so they walked into the *kodesh hakodashim* full of love and desire to be with God. They were not afraid of death. Death, if it would come, would just be another way of getting closer to Hashem. This is just what happened, though it wasn't intentional. They were blinded by their incredible love for Hashem. They went into the place that they thought was pure love with no punishment. They thought God would destroy the evil of the world and just open up the gates of love.

However, they made a mistake. Neither they nor their generation was ready for that. The Jewish People and the world needed fear of Hashem in order to function. It was not yet time for unbridled, passionate, all-consuming love without the fear of Hashem, without the fear of overstepping bounds.

This was their flaw, and it was a positive one. They loved Hashem so much that they forgot that the people of their generation, themselves included, were not yet ready. They shouldn't have thrown away all restrictions in order to engage in a passionate encounter and embrace with the Almighty.

God uses many different middos to relate to the world. Love is foremost among them, but He also utilizes fear

and terror. Nadav and Avihu unfortunately were taken as a sacrifice in order to teach the world that, no matter how special, central, and important ahavas Hashem is, we also need yiras Hashem. We can't overstep our bounds. Ironically, love itself can be a cause of sin.

Ahava Must Be Coupled with Yira

The Midrash expounds on the pasuk in our parsha: “*B'zos yavo Aharon el hakodesh*. Aharon has to come into the kodesh [hakodashim] in this way” (Vayikra 16:3). The Midrash teaches that aside from the strictly prescribed service, there are also ten special merits that accompany Aharon into the kodesh hakodashim: Torah, Shabbos, Yerushalayim, the twelve tribes, sheivet Yehuda, Israel, teruma, ma'aser, korbanos, and mila. These merits are necessary. You can't just walk into that most holy place; you have to be fulfilling mitzvos. We have to channel our love into good things, and we need to have yiras Hashem, too.

The Mishna (Keilim 1:1) teaches us that there are ten levels of holiness in space, the highest of which is the kodesh hakodashim. Aharon enters this tenth level. The Midrash also says that there are ten kinds of Jews. Aharon is the holiest of people, the kohen gadol. He goes into the holiest place at the holiest time of the year, on Yom Kippur. All of this must be done with ahava; that's the goal.

But all of this service and all of the merits that we have throughout the whole year must be coupled with fear of heaven. The fear is the foundation of the kohen gadol's entry into the kodesh hakodashim and is necessary in order to properly experience Hashem's love for His people.

We are against cold, aloof, passionless service of Hashem. We should be emotional! We should be on fire in seeking God and in our devotion to people, especially to the Jewish People. Nonetheless, we cannot let our ahava make us forget that we are limited flesh and blood. We can sin, and we do occasionally make mistakes.

Every time we take that passionate step towards Hashem, we must feel a trepidation and hesitation, a yiras Hashem. The pasuk says *gilu bir'ada*—have that joy of dancing with God, but shake with fear while doing so (Tehillim 2:11).

Movements of Love

The great Rebbes have always emphasized yiras Hashem. We must make sure that we do the mitzvos properly, and

we should be afraid of making mistakes and sinning. This yira allows our ahavas Hashem to burst forth in proper ways.

Christianity moved away from yira, dropping most of it. Instead, it almost exclusively emphasized ahava, love of God and people. Christianity abandoned the mitzvos because it said that God only wants love. This is not true. A person has to work his way up to earn love. We see a world today that has a distorted sense of love, because there is not enough fear of heaven.

The Torah and Chassidus (the movement of love epitomized by the Ba'al Shem Tov and Reb Levi Yitzchak) also emphasize yiras Hashem. We cannot forget it. We must be careful not to misuse that divine love we seek and wish to express. It must go hand in hand with yiras Hashem.

This was the mistake of Nadav and Avihu. They thought ahavas Hashem is everything and that you don't need yiras Hashem. They mistakenly abandoned yiras Hashem, and paid for this mistake with their lives.

As we grow in our ahavas Hashem, we must remember that to be inspired and passionate, we need to balance ourselves with fear. We should love every Jew limitlessly. Yet we know our weaknesses. We cannot delude ourselves into thinking that we can handle life with unbridled love alone. We must be sure that we act within the rules and parameters of halacha and Shulchan Aruch. These are the dos and don'ts that help us ensure that our passions don't become distorted.

The Shem Mishmuel notes that Shabbos is a day of ahava, when the evil side is much weaker. If we keep the rules of Shabbos, we can express a love of Hashem and of Israel with more passion and energy than during the rest of the week. During the rest of the week, we have to be afraid of distortions brought on by the evil side. But Shabbos weakens evil, so we can express more passion in our love of Hashem, Yisrael, and Torah.

Let us hope that, one day, we will merit to see the next world of consummate love, where ahavas Hashem will burn as strong as fire. Everyone will be able to feel and see it without fear of the evil side distorting the energy of holy, passionate love. We will love Hashem and His people with all of our soul, heart, and might—completely.

To Live By Them

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week we read the double sedra of Achrei Mos-Kedoshim. Included are the mitzvos and halachos regarding the avodah of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, forbidden physical relationships, the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael, and the myriad of mitzvos bein adam la'chavairo (mitzvos that govern inter-personal relationships) detailed in Parshas Kedoshim.

In Parshas Achrei Mos we are instructed regarding the famous dictum to live by the mitzvos, and as Chazal interpret: to live by them, and not to die by them.

The pasuk tells us: ושמרתם את-חקתי ואת-משפטי אשר יעשה: וחי בהם אני ה' - *and you shall guard My decrees and My laws, that a person shall do them, and he shall live by them, I am Hashem* (Vayikra 18:5). Rashi comments: וחי בהם - *and he shall live by them: this refers to eternal life in the World to Come, for if you will say it refers to life in this world, is it not the fate of all that in the end, man dies?*

And the Sages teach (Sanhedrin 74a): וחי בהם ולא שימות: וחי בהם - *'that he shall live by them', and not that he shall die by them.*

The sole purpose of man in this world is to live to serve his Creator. And it is only through Torah and mitzvos that we live, in as much as they sustain us in this world, and give eternal life to our neshamos in the Next World.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand quotes a beautiful interpretation of this mitzvah, 'to live by them', from the Gerrer Rebbe. Rabbi Frand writes, "The Gerrer Rebber offers a chassidische interpretation of this phrase 'וחי בהם, and you shall live by them'. What do we call 'living by them'?"

"In the yeshivah world, one often hears the question, 'Where do you get your chiyus?' Literally, this means 'Where do you get your life?' The question touches on a profound issue. Where do you find the spark of your life? What brightens up your day when you get out of bed in the morning? What excites you? What gives you the zest of life? For some people, it is the prospect of learning Torah. For others, it is the opportunity to do some good work in Jewish outreach. And for others, it is the prospect of a good steak or a good game of baseball or football.

"This, says the Gerrer Rebbe, is what the Torah is telling us. A person should 'live by the mitzvos.' His chiyus, his zest for life, should derive from the prospect of doing

mitzvos. These should be the entire *raison d'être* for his existence in this fleeting, material world.

"Before you turn around, your life in this world is over, even if you were blessed with a ripe old age. It seems that all of life is all but a dream, an illusion. You cannot look for the meaning of life in this world, only in the Eternal World of Truth, and only Torah and mitzvos will take you there. Only mitzvos will give you an everlasting, meaningful life."

One must consider the pursuit of material goods and wealth. "One should never seek to accumulate money for its own sake. What will it get you? A little extra pleasure in this world? Is that life? Is that where you are expecting to find your chiyus? True, one must work as much as is necessary in order to provide a livelihood and sustenance for his family, but after that, he should seek chiyus from doing mitzvos and chessed with one's wife and children, with one's family, community, with the Jewish people.

"You should seek your chiyus in Torah, and in building a closer relationship with the RS"O. That is the key to eternal life" (Rabbi Frand on the Parashah, p.172-173).

The Sages understand that when the Torah commands us to "live by them" it means, to live, and not to die. Hence, Chazal further understand that 'and you shall live by them' teaches us: וְהָלַל עָלַי שַׁבָּת אַחַת כִּדְי שְׂיִשְׁמֹר שַׁבְּתוֹת הַרְבֵּה - *Desecrate one Shabbos on his behalf so that he will live in order to observe many Shabbasos* (Yoma 85b).

Sometimes it becomes necessary to desecrate and transgress a mitzvah (under the discretion and direction of one's Rav!) so that one shall live, and be able to fulfill many mitzvos in the future.

However, the Gerrer Rebbe understands an additional message and lesson. וחי בהם - *and live by them!* Each person must ask himself, from what, and for what, do I live? What is it that fuels my hours, my days, my weeks and my years? What in this world gives me the chiyus to wake up each day and be productive with my time? What do I view as fleeting and passing by, and what do I view as the source of eternal life?

Every morning a Jew wakes up and recites the 'modeh ani' prayer. As we thank Hashem for returning our souls to us anew each morning, and praise Him for 'rabbah Emuna'secha' - the great faith He has in us, we must consider the command to 'live by them.' To ensure that

our will, drive and motivation to live comes from Torah learning, performance of mitzvos, and acts of gemillus chessed. If we are fueled in this world by Torah and mitzvos, then we will be eternally rewarded in the Next World.

עֲקֵבֵיָא בֶן מִהֲלָלָא אֹמֵר, הַסְתַּכַּל בְּשִׁלְשָׁה דְבָרִים וְאֵי אַתָּה בָּא לְיָדֵי עֲבֵרָה. דַּע מֵאֵין בְּאַתָּה, וְלֵאָן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, וְלִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עֹתִיד לָתֵן דִּין וְחֶשְׁבוֹן. מֵאֵין בְּאַתָּה, מִשְׁפָּה סְרוּחָה, וְלֵאָן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, לְמִקּוּם עֶפְרָרְמָה וְתוֹלְעָה. וְלִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עֹתִיד לָתֵן דִּין וְחֶשְׁבוֹן, לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים

The 3rd Kiddush Hashem

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Hashem is infinite and His uncontainable presence spans the entire cosmos. Yet, His presence on this Earth is a function of human behavior. By empowering human beings with freedom of conscience and with free will, Hashem anchored His presence on Earth to human history.

In particular, Hashem entrusted His chosen people as His representatives to humanity. Actions which augment His presence constitute a kiddush Hashem and, sadly, actions which diminish His presence create a chilul Hashem. The commandment to generate a kiddush Hashem stems from the pasuk of *בני ישראל בתוך בני ישראל*, a phrase which underscores the relationship between Jewish history and kiddush Hashem.

Jewish Martyrdom

Bringing Hashem into our world hasn't always been easy. Ideally, we were meant to represent Him by living in His land and modeling a godly lifestyle to an international audience. Namely, our kiddush Hashem agenda was meant to be peaceful and serene. Sadly, we wrecked that historical narrative and replaced it with a more circuitous and violent arc, which would plunge us into two exiles and thrust us into thousands of years of homelessness.

During that long dreadful odyssey, we would be fiercely challenged to uphold Hashem's presence. The Jewish faith was viciously attacked and the rising popularity of Christianity and Islam certainly corroborated antagonistic claims that Hashem had replaced us with a different nation. We faced brutal religious persecution and fell under immense pressure, both physical and psychological to convert. The cost for defiance was often death. Refusing to buckle to this ferocious pressure, we valiantly defended the divine presence with our own lives. The long trail of Jewish

Consider three things and you will not come to sin: Know from where you came, and to where you are going, and before Whom you will give an accounting in the Next World (Avos 3:1 - read this coming Shabbos afternoon after Mincha).

May our love and motivation for Torah and mitzvos always be the purpose for our living, so that in the Next World, we will be able to testify and say "וְחֵי בָהֶם", I strove to always live by them.

martyrdom is a fearsome but heroic story of a loyal nation doggedly upholding their commitments at Sinai.

The first public theological faceoff over the presence of Hashem occurred between Nevuchadnezar and three Jews who had been expatriated from Yerushalayim to Bavel. Resisting this indomitable tyrant's demand to worship his idol Chania, Mishael, and Azaryah faced a fiery death sentence. Their defiant stand and their miraculous escape restored Hashem's presence to a gloomy world. As they were being hurled into the fire they shouted *לא לנו ה' לא לנו* - they were conscious that their heroism was repairing Hashem's presence during a broken period of history.

Approximately 500 years later, Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues were mercilessly and savagely murdered as they resisted the mighty Roman empire and its colossal armies. Rabbi Akiva's repeated insistence upon teaching, Torah despite stiff Roman decrees landed him in jail awaiting execution. As he was being crushed to death he recited *shema Yisrael* and launched two thousand years of Jewish martyrdom. Over the next two millennia, we faced furious and relentless pressure to abandon our religion and abdicate our historical mission. Following in Rabbi Akiva's legacy we courageously defended Hashem's presence by sacrificing our own lives for an invisible G-d we literally loved more than ourselves.

Kiddush Hashem Through Life

Kiddush Hashem, however, isn't only expressed through a dramatic act of martyrdom. Jews don't have a death wish and we hope to represent Hashem through the lives we lead and through the values we display. Every page of Torah studied and every mitzvah performed increases Hashem's presence, even if that amplification isn't discernable to

the naked eye. Additionally, in our day-to-day behavior we model the dignity and nobility of a life lived before Hashem, showcasing the value of commandments and of historical covenant.

Moreover, by infusing our lives with ethical spirit we hope to inspire the world to higher moral ground. The gemara documents Torah sages who behaved with extraordinary moral sensitivity to avoid any defilement of Hashem's spirit. These religious figures understood that as they were associated with Hashem their behavior would be heavily scrutinized. They voluntarily returned lost items to Gentiles, were careful about their eating habits, and promptly paid their bills. Alienation from religion often stems from the inability to reconcile religion with moral instinct. When religion appears to clash with moral sensibilities it is often discarded. Witnessing religious personalities acting inappropriately disillusion people from religion.

Religious Jews have, recently, become more visible in the public eye- both in Israel and even in the United States. As religious people enter the public realm, they must be extremely vigilant about their behavior and their speech. As public personalities associated with Judaism their behavior reflects the image of Hashem and they can raise His presence of, G-d forbid sabotage it.

The 3rd Kiddush Hashem

In addition to defending Hashem with our lives and to living a moral lifestyle of commandments, there is a third manner in which Hashem's presence is augmented. In perek 20, Yechezkeil describes a narrative of yetziat mitzrayim which is starkly different from the story of sefer Shemot. In his portrayal, Hashem expected us to launch our own redemption by withdrawing from our pagan habits. Sadly, decades of slavery had eroded our faith and we had descended into pagan culture. Unfortunately, we lacked the courage and the imagination to take the first leap in response to Hashem's invitation. Responding to our apathy Hashem "considered" annihilating us. Failing to fulfill historical expectations we had little right to be redeemed from slavery. This alternative narrative poses a thorny question which sefer Shemot ignores: why were we redeemed if we were undeserving?

The answer to that question is unambiguous: We were

redeemed because our destruction would have reflected poorly upon Hakadosh Baruch Hu. As His chosen nation, we had been aligned with Him for the previous 400 years. To annihilate us at that delicate historical juncture would have caused a regression of the divine presence from our world. That level of Chilul Hashem could not be countenanced and, therefore, we were liberated and redeemed even though we were undeserving of His intervention.

Yechezkeil's outline of yetziat Mitzrayim profiles a third dimension of kiddush and chilul Hashem. The general "state" or condition of the Jewish people reflects upon Hashem. When we flourish, Hashem's presence is augmented. When our national condition declines Hashem's presence regresses and a chilul Hashem follows. Sometimes we are redeemed to avoid an exacerbation of chilul Hashem.

The Holocaust was the darkest period in Jewish history since the destruction of the second Mikdash. The attempt to methodically eliminate anything and everything Jewish from the streets of Europe was an assault not just on the Jewish people, but upon the presence of Hashem. For those five dark years Hashem's presence was dimmed by malicious and murderous human behavior. A chilul

Hashem of that magnitude required a kiddush Hashem to restore the grandeur of Hashem.

That kiddush Hashem occurred a mere three years afterwards. Three years in the sweep of history is a passing hiccup. Our return to our land and to historical relevance and even prominence reestablished His presence. Over the years since our state was renewed, as Israel has prospered, Hashem's presence has similarly increased. Hashem's presence is not only a product of dramatic theological religious faceoffs, or of Torah infused lives. Hashem is affected by the arc of Jewish destiny; when our national condition ascends His presence is more deeply felt.

We are living in the third dimension of kiddush Hashem. We may not have deserved redemption, but history demanded it. Hashem 'had to' respond to the atrocity of the Holocaust. The state of Israel resuscitated Jewish pride and relived Jewish suffering, but, most, importantly, renovated Hashem's glory in the world of Man.

Are Hybrids Bad for Nature?

Rabbi Jared Anstandig

According to the Torah, hybrids are so bad that the prohibition involving them spans three different domains. In one verse, the Torah prohibits kilayim - crossbreeding domesticated animals, crossbreeding plants, and sewing garments with a mixture of certain fibres (Vayikra 19:19).

At first glance, there appears to be no rhyme or reason for these prohibitions. In fact, Rashi (Vayikra 19:19) likens these particular commandments to, “decrees of the king, about which there is no reason.” According to Rashi’s formulation here, it appears that there is no meaning at all behind these prohibitions.

Ramban (Vayikra 19:19) clarifies that this is not the case. Rather, he explains that Rashi’s intention is to equate these mitzvot to, “decrees of the king that he decrees on his kingdom without revealing their reason to the nation.” According to Ramban’s explanation of Rashi, these prohibitions have a definite rationale and reason. It is only that the Torah does not directly reveal the reason to us.

Ramban and Rashi’s interpretations notwithstanding, many traditional and contemporary commentaries venture suggestions as to the reason for the prohibition of kilayim, and specifically when it comes to animals and crops.

As he so often does, Rambam argues that these prohibitions are in order to distance us from idolatry. For instance, in the Moreh Nevuchim (3:37) he explains that a common pagan ritual included grafting different species of trees together. Accordingly, he writes that “the Law, therefore, prohibits us to mix different species together, i.e., to graft one tree into another, because we must keep away from the opinions of idolaters and their abominations.” (adapted from Friedlander 1903 translation) By refraining from cross-breeding, we deny the fundamental practices of pagans.

Many commentators avoid Rambam’s approach and instead suggest that mixing species is inherently chaotic and works against G-d’s intentions for creation. Rabbi Dovid Zvi Hoffman, for instance, notes that in the account of the creation of the world, the Torah stresses that animals and plants were created *l’mineihem*, in accordance with

their species (see Bereishit 1:11, 21, and 24). To blend them together is to introduce disorder into an otherwise ordered world.

Ramban, in his commentary here, picks up on a similar theme but uses even stronger language. He writes (Vayikra 19:19) that one who crossbreeds is making “improvements” to creation. Such a person is acting “as though he thinks that G-d did not completely perfect His world, and so he wants to help Him in His creation and add creatures to it.” For us to crossbreed and generate new species would be a challenge to His perfection. Had G-d wanted a hybrid animal or plant, He would have created one.

The Maharal (Gur Aryeh to Vayikra 19:19) takes strong issue with this approach. He cites a midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 11:6) which states the opposite of Ramban’s assertion. This midrash states, “Everything that is created in the world requires work.” [In the version Gur Aryeh quotes, he has “improvement” instead of “work”.] As an example, the midrash points to the act of baking bread, which requires an alteration of the natural form of wheat. Would we say that baking bread is an affront to G-d’s perfection? Certainly not! Accordingly, it cannot be that kilayim is prohibited because it is a creative act.

Perhaps one could defend Ramban by conceding to the Maharal that, in principle, we are indeed encouraged to perfect the world in which we live. However, Ramban may argue that there are exceptions. As a primarily agrarian society, the domesticated animals with which Bnei Yisrael worked and the crops they sowed were among their most valuable assets. Perhaps it is precisely in these two areas that G-d prohibits intermingling of species. In nearly every area of our lives, we ought to see ourselves as partners with G-d in creation, helping Him perfect His world. But regarding the tools we use to survive, G-d wants us to check our hubris. There is a limit to our abilities. Our success, at its core, cannot be engineered by our own creativity. Ultimately, we rely on G-d’s benevolence. The prohibition of kilayim forces us to recognize G-d’s care in our lives.

Sibling Revelry

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Parshas Acharei-Mos begins with the command that Aharon, the kohen gadol, was not permitted to enter the קודש הקדשים (the inner chamber of the Beis Ha'mikdash) whenever he wished. This was permitted only as part of the special Yom Kippur service, when special korbanos were brought and their blood was sprinkled in the קודש הקדשים. God instructed Moshe: דבר הקודש – אל אהרון אחיך, ואל יבא בכל עת הקודש, *“Speak to your brother, Aharon, that he shall not enter the sanctum anytime”* (16:2).

Why did God find it necessary to emphasize to Moshe that Aharon was אחיך, his brother? How was their familial relationship relevant to this command?

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck explains that Moshe might have been reluctant to convey this command to Aharon, because Moshe himself was not bound by this restriction. Whereas Aharon was permitted to enter the קודש הקדשים only when performing the Yom Kippur service, Moshe was allowed to enter whenever he wished. Moshe had a different set of rules. He thus feared that he would upset Aharon and make him feel envious by relaying God's command forbidding him from entering the קודש הקדשים. God therefore emphasized to Moshe that Aharon was אחיך, his brother. As his brother, Aharon celebrated Moshe's successes and achievements, rather than resenting them. Aharon and Moshe's relationship was characterized not by sibling rivalry, but by sibling revelry, by rejoicing over each other's good fortune.

Chazal speak about the vitally important quality of נושא בעול חבירו – bearing our fellow's burden. This is commonly understood as a reference to shouldering our fellow's burden of pain during his time of sorrow or hardship. However, the Alter of Kelm taught that this includes also sharing in our fellow's joy, in celebrating another person's success and good fortune. And this aspect of נושא בעול חבירו, the Alter observed, is more difficult than shouldering

our fellow's burden of pain. When we hear of somebody who suffers some kind of crisis, it is relatively easy to empathize and to want to help ease his pain, because we are so grateful that we do not face this challenge. But when we see or hear of our fellow's good fortune, when we see him pull into his driveway with his new luxury car, or hear of his promotion, or read in the shul newsletter that he has yet another child who got engaged or had a baby, we might ask ourselves, “Why him and not me?” We must try to resist this tendency and celebrate our fellow's achievements and good fortune, as if they are our own.

Rav Aryeh Tzvi Frommer of Kozhiglov, in Eretz Tzvi, comments that the way we fulfill the command of לא תחמוד and avoid feelings of envy and jealousy, is by fulfilling the mitzva of ואהבת לרעך כמוך, by loving our fellow as ourselves. If we see a fellow Jew as an extension of ourselves, then his achievements and good fortune are our achievements and good fortune. The Gemara in Maseches Sanhedrin (105b) observes that a person is naturally inclined to feel jealous of all people, except his child and student. Generally speaking, a parent is not jealous of a child or student whose achievements surpass his, because parents see their children, and teachers see their students, as extensions of themselves. The mitzva of ואהבת לרעך כמוך challenges us to look upon all our fellow Jews in this fashion. And when we do, we will genuinely rejoice over our fellow's good fortune as though it were our own, and thus avoid feelings of jealousy.

We should never feel that we are in competition with other people. Our fellow's financial success does not take away from our financial success. Our fellow's simcha does not take away from our simcha. Just as we are to empathize with our fellow in distress, so are we to genuinely share in our fellow's joy, because one Jew's good fortune is all Am Yisrael's good fortune.

The Jewish Attitude Toward Sexuality

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

Both of this week's parashiot, Acharei Mot and Kedoshim, contain extensive regulations regarding forbidden marriages and sexual offenses. Particularly in light of the redefinition of acceptable sexual

norms that has taken place in our society over the past decades, these two chapters (Leviticus 18 & 20) appear particularly germane and relevant.

As we've noted in previous studies of these parashiot,

the Torah declares the main purpose of Jewish life is to establish a “Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation” (Exodus 19:6). The world in which the newly formed People of Israel found themselves 3300 years ago was entirely antithetical to that Divine prescription of holiness.

The Midrash in Vayikra Rabba, cited by R. Eliyahu KiTov in *Sefer haParashiot*, Acharei Mot, pp. 46-49, graphically describes how the ancient Israelite slaves had sunken to the 49th level of impurity as they participated with their Egyptian masters in the orgiastic “blood feasts” in ancient Egypt. And now, this inchoate and uninitiated people was destined to confront the blandishments of the local Canaanite nations and their orgiastic practices, and be called upon to resist their enticing and seductive decadent lifestyles.

The late contemporary Bible scholar, Bernard J. Bamberger, writes in his *Modern Commentary on The Torah*, (pp. 877-879), that in the ancient Near East civilizations, sexuality was intimately associated with the Temple cult. The concept of the “Mother Goddess,” and her marriage to a divine consort called “Baal,” was a prominent feature of those cultures. This divine union was often celebrated with sexual orgies at shrines or in the fields. The pagan people of those times believed that these rites increased the fertility of the soil. It was not uncommon for male and female prostitutes to perform at the temples, with their earnings donated to the temple treasuries.

In this most hostile moral environment, the Torah loudly proclaimed (Deuteronomy 6:4): **הַשֵּׁם אֶחָד, ה' אֶחָד**, *The L-rd is our G-d, the Lord is one*. The Jewish G-d has no mother, no father, or any partners, and is not identified with any natural force or principle. In stark contrast to the pagan idea, human sexuality in Judaism is considered a Divine gift to be used primarily for reproduction, but also for pleasure. And, while Judaism strongly condemned mindless surrender to sensuality, the sexual impulse was not to be repressed, but to be controlled and sanctified.

It is this sense of balance that Judaism tries to bring to all human desires and expressions—whether it be food or drink, thought or speech, modesty or humility, anger or passivity. And, so, while the Bible records 17 prohibited sexual relationships that the rabbis extended by an additional 26 relationships, Judaism is hardly a sexually ascetic or repressive religion. To the contrary, reproduction is a mitzvah in Judaism (**פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ** Genesis 1:28), and so is providing sexual pleasure to one’s wife (Exodus 21:10).

While adultery, incest, homosexual practices and intercourse with animals were strictly forbidden, the Torah encourages heterosexual marriage as the normal vehicle for

sexual expression, and girls and boys were often married at a tender age. Although marriage at an early age may be regarded as problematic by contemporary standards, it was an extremely effective way of controlling youthful “hormones” in ancient times. Sexuality within marriage was not only natural, it was sanctified and holy. Marriage in Judaism is therefore known as **קִידוּשִׁין**—“*Kiddushin*,” sanctification, because it is meant to serve as a vehicle for sanctifying the people.

Although Judaism regarded the celibate lifestyle as sinful, it was, apparently, practiced by some Jewish cults (possibly the Essenes) in the ancient Dead Sea area before the turn of the common era. It may have been these celibate groups that influenced early Christianity to regard celibacy as an exalted way of life. This, however, was never the Jewish norm, and its practice was condemned by mainstream Judaism. It is unclear whether our rabbis foresaw the unfortunate behaviors that would result from the unnatural demands of celibacy on human beings. Yet, once again, Judaism has proven to be right on the money when perceiving peoples’ physical and psychological needs. As Bamberger writes, “it was the Christian teachers who identified ‘the flesh’ with sin, glorified celibacy, and regarded marriage as a concession to human frailty.” Jews were never saddled with the concept of “Original Sin.” Procreation was a mitzvah (Genesis 1:28), so much so, that in fact the human being is directed to cleave to his wife, so that they become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

Despite the many restrictions recorded in parashiot Acharei Mot and Kedoshim, Judaism looks upon the union of man and woman within the marriage context as the most favorable element in the building block of life. Bereishith Rabbah 9:7, citing Genesis 1:31, notes that even the **יֵצֵר הָרָע**—“*Yetzer Hara*”—the so-called “evil inclination,” was declared by the rabbis to be “very good” because it arouses sexual desire, leading to the establishment of family. As a result, the Mishnah, Berachot 9:5, calls upon the Jew to serve G-d even with the evil impulse as well as the good.

It is the critical concept of “balance” that truly reflects the structure and substance of Jewish life. “Balance”—calls out to the Jew to avoid extremes, not to canonize restrictions, nor abuse liberties. Judaism is a civilization based on structure, neither ascetic nor libertarian, neither excessive nor repressive, but balanced.

It is this Divine sense of balance that pulsates so profoundly in the Torah as we read the dynamic chapters of Acharei Mot and Kedoshim.