

# Likutei Divrei Torah

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l

### Holy People, Holy Land

I had been engaged in dialogue for two years with an Imam from the Middle East, a gentle and seemingly moderate man. One day, in the middle of our conversation, he turned to me and asked, “Why do you Jews need a land? After all, Judaism is a religion, not a country or a nation.”

I decided at that point to discontinue the dialogue. There are 56 Islamic states and more than 100 nations in which Christians form the majority of the population. There is only one Jewish state, 1/25th the size of France, roughly the same size as the Kruger National Park in South Africa. With those who believe that Jews, alone among the nations of the world, are not entitled to their own land, it is hard to hold a conversation.

Yet the question of the need for a land of our own is worth exploring. There is no doubt, as D.J. Clines explains in his book, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, that the central narrative of the Torah is the promise of and journey to the land of Israel. Yet why is this so? Why did the people of the covenant need their own land? Why was Judaism not, on the one hand, a religion that can be practised by individuals wherever they happen to be, or on the other, a religion like Christianity or Islam whose ultimate purpose is to convert the world so that everyone can practise the one true faith?

The best way of approaching an answer is through an important comment of the Ramban (Nahmanides, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman Girondi, born Gerona, 1194, died in Israel, 1270) on this week’s parsha. Chapter 18 contains a list of forbidden sexual practices. It ends with this solemn warning:

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. The land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep My decrees and My laws . . . If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. Lev. 18:24-28

Nahmanides asks the obvious question. Reward and punishment in the Torah are based on the principle of middah kenegged middah, measure for measure. The punishment must fit the sin or crime. It makes sense to say that if the Israelites neglected or broke mitzvot hateluyot ba’arets, the commands relating to the land of Israel, the punishment would be

exile from the land of Israel. So the Torah says in the curses in Bechukotai:

“All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.” Lev. 26:35

Its meaning is clear: this will be the punishment for not observing the laws of shemittah, the sabbatical year. Shemittah is a command relating to the land. Therefore the punishment for its non-observance is exile from the land.

But sexual offences have nothing to do with the land. They are mitzvot hateluyot baguf, commands relating to person, not place. Ramban answers by stating that all the commands are intrinsically related to the land of Israel. It is simply not the same to put on tefillin or keep kashrut or observe Shabbat in the Diaspora as in Israel. In support of his position he quotes the Talmud (Ketubot 110b) which says:

“Whoever lives outside the land is as if he had no God” and the Sifre that states, “Living in the land of Israel is of equal importance to all the commandments of the Torah.” Ketubot 110b

The Torah is the constitution of a holy people in the holy land.

Ramban explains this mystically but we can understand it non-mystically by reflecting on the opening chapters of the Torah and the story they tell about the human condition and about God’s disappointment with the only species – us – He created in His image. God sought a humanity that would freely choose to do the will of its Creator. Humanity chose otherwise. Adam and Eve sinned. Cain murdered his brother Abel. Within a short time “the earth was filled with violence” and God “regretted that He had made human beings on earth.” He brought a flood and began again, this time with the righteous Noah, but again humans disappointed Him by building a city with a tower on which they sought to reach heaven, and God chose another way of bringing humanity to recognise him – this time not by universal rules (though these remained, namely the covenant with all humanity through Noah), but by a living example: Abraham, Sarah and their children.

In Genesis 18 the Torah makes clear what God sought from Abraham: that he would teach his children and his household after him “to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” Homo sapiens is, as both Aristotle and Maimonides said, a social animal, and

righteousness and justice are features of a good society. We know from the story of Noah and the Ark that a righteous individual can save themselves but not the society in which they live, unless they transform the society in which they live.

Taken collectively, the commands of the Torah are a prescription for the construction of a society with the consciousness of God at its centre. God asks the Jewish people to become a role model for humanity by the shape and texture of the society they build, a society characterised by justice and the rule of law, welfare and concern for the poor, the marginal, the vulnerable and the weak, a society in which all would have equal dignity under the sovereignty of God. Such a society would win the admiration, and eventually the emulation, of others:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws . . . so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will be your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” . . . What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Deut. 4:5-8

A society needs a land, a home, a location in space, where a nation can shape its own destiny in accord with its deepest aspirations and ideals. Jews have been around for a long time, almost four thousand years since Abraham began his journey. During that period they have lived in every country on the face of the earth, under good conditions and bad, freedom and persecution. Yet in all that time there was only one place where they formed a majority and exercised sovereignty, the land of Israel, a tiny country of difficult terrain and all too little rainfall, surrounded by enemies and empires.

Jews never relinquished the dream of return. Wherever they were, they prayed about Israel and facing Israel. The Jewish people has always been the circumference of a circle at whose centre was the holy land and Jerusalem the holy city. During those long centuries of exile they lived suspended between memory and hope, sustained by the promise that one day God would bring them back.

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Only in Israel is the fulfilment of the commands a society-building exercise, shaping the contours of a culture as a whole. Only in Israel can we fulfil the commands in a land, a landscape and a language saturated with Jewish memories and hopes. Only in Israel does the calendar track the rhythms of the Jewish year. In Israel Judaism is part of the public square, not just the private, sequestered space of synagogue, school and home.

Jews need a land because they are a nation charged with bringing the Divine Presence down to earth in the shared spaces of our collective life, not least – as the last chapter of Acharei Mot makes clear – by the way we conduct our most intimate relationships, a society in which marriage is sacrosanct and sexual fidelity the norm.

This message, that Jews need a land to create their society and follow the Divine plan, contains a message for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. To Christians and Muslims it says: if you believe in the God of Abraham, grant that the children of Abraham have a right to the Land that the God in whom you believe promised them, and to which He promised them that after exile they would return.

To Jews it says: that very right comes hand-in-hand with a duty to live individually and collectively by the standards of justice and compassion, fidelity and generosity, love of neighbour and of stranger, that alone constitute our mission and destiny: a holy people in the holy land.

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**Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin  
Be Passionately Moderate!**

“And God spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they came near before the Lord and died.” (Leviticus 16:1)

Which is the greater evil in God’s eyes – hot sins of passion or cold sins of apathy? Rabbenu Zadok HaKohen of Lublin (1822–1900), in his masterful work *Pri Zaddik* on the portions of the week, cites a famous midrash of an individual walking on a road (life’s journey), seductively being summoned either by fire to his right or snow to his left. The wise traveler understands that he must remain at the center, avoiding both extremes of either fanatic passion (fire) or disinterested apathy (snow).

But which of the two extremes is more problematic?

A sin of apathy – symbolized by snow – could well describe the infamous transgression of the scouts, tribal chiefs sent by Moses to bring back a report about the land of Israel. Although they did not conceal the positive aspects of the Promised Land (flowing with milk and honey, and grapes so huge eight men were required to carry each cluster), ten of the scouts nonetheless stressed the negative: a race of people descended from giants who would be impossible to conquer. At the end of the day it

was their (and the nation’s) apathy toward Israel and disinterest in the religious and political challenge and potential of national sovereignty, which led them to take the path of least resistance and either return to Egypt or remain in the desert. Their sin was one of coldness and disillusionment, a lack of idealism bordering on cynicism.

In contrast to the apathy of the spies, the classic example of a sin of passion may be ascribed to Nadav and Avihu, Aaron’s sons who died when they brought an unauthorized offering of “strange fire,” referred to in the beginning of this Torah portion. The initial event describes the dedication of the Sanctuary, amidst all of the pomp and circumstance of the priestly ritual, which achieves a climax when the Almighty sends down a fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice of the Israelites and to demonstrate His acceptance of their service. The people become exultant, fall on their faces in worship! And in this moment of ecstasy Nadav and Avihu, sons of the high priest and major celebrants at this consecration, express their passion for God in bringing a “strange fire which had not been commanded.” They are immediately killed by God in a fire from above. It seems clear that here is the prototypical “sin of fire,” excessive ecstasy which – if not tempered by divine law – can lead to zealous fanaticism which must be stopped in its tracks.

Nevertheless, I would argue that in the scale of transgression, “sins of fire” are generally more forgivable than are “sins of snow.” Even if Nadav and Avihu committed a transgression in bringing their strange fire, Moses mitigates their crime when he communicates God’s reaction to his bereft brother: “I will be sanctified through them that come near to me, and before all the people will I be glorified.” (Leviticus 10:3)

The sense of the verse is that although the transgression had to be punished, the perpetrators of the crime are still referred to as being “near” to the divine. In contrast, the apathy of the spies leads to major tragedies throughout the course of Jewish history, starting with the punishment of the entire desert generation. “They will therefore not see the land that I swore to their ancestors.” (Numbers 14:23)

Moreover, the self-imposed passion of Nadav and Avihu, although it leads to the tragic deaths of these two ecstatic celebrants, does not go beyond the “transgressors themselves”; the Bible adds a further commandment several verses after the description of their death: “Drink no wine or strong drink...when you go into the Tent of Meeting, that you die not...” (Leviticus 10:9)

In effect, the Bible is forbidding unbridled ecstasy within divine service. But this is a far cry from the punishment of the Ninth of Av tragedy (the day of the scouts’ report) which

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portends Jewish exile and persecution for thousands of years!

Finally, one most striking feature of this portion’s opening verse, which refers back to the transgression of Aaron’s sons who “came near before the Lord and died,” is the absence of the names of Nadav and Avihu. Could the Torah be distinguishing the act from the actors, the crime from its perpetrators? Passion that can lead to fanaticism must be stopped and condemned, but the individuals, whose motives were pure, remain close to the Almighty even in their moment of punishment! And despite the fact that excessive passion resulted in the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the service in the Temple goes on. Once again, in contrast, when the ten tribal heads refuse to enter the land, they are in effect saying no to the entire plan of God; Jewish history comes to a forty-year standstill because of the apathy, and faithlessness of the scouts.

Rabbenu Zadok goes one step further in his interpretation, explaining the root cause of sins of apathy. Why do people or nations fall prey to the snow of icy coldness and disinterested paralysis? What gives rise to a cynical dismissal in place of an idealistic involvement? It is the individual’s lack of belief in his capability to succeed in the activity; cynical nay-saying can often serve as a protection against failure and disappointment. Remember how the scouts described the giant inhabitants of Canaan: “We were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes.” Numbers 13:33)

The majority of the scouts began with a poor self-image, and since they cannot possibly imagine defeating the Canaanites, they decide not even to attempt it.

This connection between cold apathy and low self-image is hinted at in a verse of the song of praise, *Eshet Hayil* – “Woman of Valor” (Proverbs 31:10–31) sung at the Friday evening Sabbath table. Most of the verses praise the initiative and lovingkindness of a woman “who considers a field and buys it” (31:15) and “stretches out her palm to the poor” (31:20). But how are we to understand the following verse? “She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet.” (Proverbs 31:21)

Had the verse mentioned warm, woolen garments I would have understood the reference, but how does being clothed specifically in scarlet garments protect from snow?

If we consider snow as a metaphor for sins of apathy, then the verse is telling us a simple truth: the woman of valor is not afraid that her household will suffer from apathy and disinterestedness, a paralysis of action such as that which afflicted the generation of the scouts, because she imbues in them deep feelings of self-worth; she dresses her household in the royal garb (scarlet). If you

wish your children to emerge as kings, then bring them up like princes!

Now, if too much fire leads to death, then it might be better to choose snow over fire, and do away with the unique priestly garments which are liable to produce the exaggerated emotion of zeal! After the double deaths of Nadav and Avihu, one might speculate that if the voltage in the holy Temple is so high, the danger involved may not be worth the risk. With the death of his sons, it would have been natural for Aaron to question his capacity to serve as high priest. Maybe he even blamed himself for the deaths of his sons because of his involvement at the debacle of the golden calf – thinking that he had not done enough to dissuade the Israelites from succumbing to their idolatrous tendencies. At that time, most of the Israelites went wild and off-course with ecstatic abandon, and now his own sons went too far with their “Holy Temple” passion.

But apparently that is not the biblical perspective. After the reference to the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, this Torah portion continues with a description of the special garments Aaron must wear in order to officiate on the Day of Atonement.

“He must put on a sanctified white linen tunic, and have linen pants on his body. He must also gird himself with a linen sash, and bind his head with a linen turban. These are the sacred vestments.” (Leviticus 16:4)

I would submit that here the Torah is emphasizing that we dare not throw out the baby with the bathwater. National and religious pride must still be nurtured and fostered despite the fiery fanaticism which can sometimes emerge from special unique garb and inspiring divine service. What we see from this discussion is that although both passion and apathy have inherent dangers, the results of apathy can be far more devastating in the long run.

However, in the final analysis, if we return to our midrash about the individual who must walk in the middle of the road, neither falling prey to the fire – to the successive passion – nor to the snow, to the apathetic loss of idealism, we realize that to remain in the center is not to take a path of least resistance; it is rather the Golden Mean of Maimonides, “the truest path of sweetness and road of peace” as demarcated by our holy Torah, whose “tree of life is in the center of the garden.” The traveler must zealously guard against either extreme.

Yes, the Hassidic Kotzker Rebbe taught: “Better a ‘hot’ misnaged (opponent of the Hassidic movement) than a ‘pareve’ hassid!” But best of all is one who is passionate in his moderation, and understands that either of the extremes can lead to disaster.

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### **TTorah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

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#### **The Consultation That Never Took Place Could Have Made the Difference**

There are many different opinions as to why the two elder sons of Aharon died during the ceremony dedicating the Mishkan. An interesting Medrash Tanchuma here in Parshas Achrei Mos enumerates four things they did wrong: The “kreivah” (coming close); the “hakravah” (bringing an unsolicited offering); the “esh zarah” (foreign fire); and “lo natlu eizta zeh m’zeh” (not consulting with one another as to whether or not they should be doing what they did).

In elaborating upon this fourth point, the Medrash quotes the pasuk in Parshas Shemini that “each man took his own firepan” (Vayikra 10:1). This implies that unbeknownst to each other and independently, they decided on their own to bring this unsolicited Korban. While each came up with this idea individually, neither thought it wise to consult with his brother regarding the wisdom of bringing such an incense offering at this time.

Rav Dovid Soloveitchik asks on this Medrash: And if they would have consulted with each other, would it have made any difference? Apparently, they would have each corroborated their brother’s plan, saying, “That’s a great idea. I had the same idea!” In other words, it would not have made the slightest difference whether they consulted with one another or not before going ahead and offering this unsolicited incense offering.

However, the Medrash implies that if they would have consulted with one another first, they would not have made such a mistake. Rav Dovid Soloveitchik says that this teaches us a fact about human frailty: I could be doing something wrong, and I may even know that I am doing something wrong, but I don’t see it in myself. But when YOU do something wrong and I see YOU doing that something wrong, I will recognize the error. Therefore, if you ask me whether you should do it or not, I will tell you in no uncertain terms, “Of course, you should NOT do it. It is an aveira!”

This is actually a play on words of a Mishna in Maseches Negaim (2:5) “A person is allowed to view (for determining tzaraas status) any and all blemishes, except his own...” A person can rule halachically on the status of anyone else’s negah, but not on the person’s own negah. Aside from the legal halachic interpretation of this statement (regarding the laws of tzaraas), the Mishna has a homiletic connotation as well: People see the faults of everyone else, but not their own faults.

Had Nadav asked Avihu, “Hey, brother, I am thinking about bringing this ketores zarah before Hashem. What do you think about that idea?” Avihu would have responded on the spot “What are you – crazy???” The fact that Avihu was standing there with his own fire pan ready to do the same thing would not matter.

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He was not able to see the fallacy of his own actions, but he could readily detect that same fallacy in others.

That is what the Medrash means: Had they consulted with each other, it could very well have been that their ill-fated action would have been derailed. I can see your faults. I cannot see my own faults.

#### **The Yetzer HaRah Strives to Derail Aspirations for Purity**

Parshas Achrei Mos contains the the Avodas Yom HaKippurim that details exactly what the Kohen Gadol does on Yom Kippur. That is the parsha that we read on Yom Kippur following Shachris.

By Mincha on Yom Kippur, we also learn from Parshas Achrei Mos, but the topic is completely different: “Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: I am Hashem, your G-d. Like the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled, do not perform; and like the practice of the land of Canaan, to which I bring you, do not perform, and do not follow their traditions.” (Vayikra 18:1-3) Then we continue reading with the section of arayos, enumerating various forms of sexual immorality.

Why, on the same day, do we read about the Kohen Gadol’s once-a-year angel-like admission to the Kodosh HaKodoshim (Holy of Holies), and then, after spending six or seven hours in fasting and prayer, we need to be warned against the lowest form of moral depravity? Who are we? Are we malachim (angels) or are we mushchasim (depraved individuals)?

The answer is that human beings are capable of being both. They are capable of angel-like entrance into the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting) and the Kodosh HaKodoshim, and they are also capable of incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. A person can, in fact, go from the highest spiritual heights to the lowest depths of immorality. Not only that, but it is precisely when a person is on the highest spiritual level that the Yetzer HaRah gives a tremendous push to make that person lose this level of spirituality.

Specifically, when a person is on the highest level the Satan says, “I need to pull out all stops and make the person fall flat on his face.” The Maharal writes (Tiferes Yisrael Chapter 48) that it is not a coincidence that the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav followed immediately after Kabbalas Hatorah. Moshe Rabbeinu was still on Har Sinai. The Jews were still just post-Matan Torah. Suddenly, they make a molten image and proclaim, “This is your god, Israel, that took you out from the land of Egypt.” (Shemos 32:4) The Maharal says that they went straight from Matan Torah to Ma’aseh haEgel because there was a tremendous Yetzer HaRah at that moment. Specifically when we reach that high

madregah, there is a push of an equal and opposite force.

There is a very amazing Gemara in Maseches Yoma (19b): The Mishna describes the attempts to keep the Kohen Gadol from falling asleep on the night of Yom Kippur: The young Kohanim would snap their fingers before him and say 'My master, Kohen Gadol, stand up and dispel your drowsiness (by walking barefoot on the cold floor)!' And they would keep him occupied until the time for the slaughtering (of the morning's Korban Tamid).

The Gemara cites a Braisa which states: Abba Shaul says that even in the provinces (outside of the Bais Hamikdash without a Kohen Gadol and without an Avodas Yom HaKippurim) they used to do this (remain awake all night on Yom Kippur) as a *zecher l'Mikdash* (commemorative reenactment of the practice followed in the Bais Hamikdash). This was a beautiful thought on their part – they wanted to hold on to those magical moments of holiness that took place in the Beis Hamikdash on the holiest night of the year. However, the Braisa continues, this led to aveiros. People were staying up the whole night and (Rashi explains) men and women would mingle and have a good time together. Eventually this led to aveiros.

The Gemara then clarifies where this occurred: Eliyahu said to Rav Yehudah the brother of Rav Salla the Pious One: You always say, 'Why has the Moshiach not yet come? The answer is in fact because of that aveira on Yom Kippur in Nehardea!

How could this happen? Can you imagine in your shul – on Kol Nidre night – when every Tom, Dick and Harry comes to shul and they are in deep meditation? They even want to reenact the actions of the Kohen Gadol on Yom HaKippurim and suddenly, the people start schmoozing, they start fooling around. The next thing you know they are committing serious aveiros. How does that happen?

It happens because just the opposite of what we may expect occurs: Precisely where there is Kedusha and where there is striving to reenact and hold on to the great spiritual moments of the past, that is when the Yetzer HaRah finds the opportunity ripe to derail such aspirations of spiritual greatness.

That is why on Yom Kippur morning, we read "No man shall at that moment be in the Ohel Moed" and then on Yom Kippur afternoon by Mincha, we read "Like the abominations of Egypt where you were dwelling, you shall not do." Especially on Yom Kippur, we need to warn the people – Do not be a low-life.

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#### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

Have you ever been asked to take 'shlichut mitzvah' money? If you have, you'll be familiar with the idea. The Talmud teaches, "Shluchoi mitzvah einan nizokin." – "People

who are on a mission to perform a good deed on behalf of others will come to no harm."

With this in mind, sometimes when people are going on a journey, family or friends might give them some money, asking, "When you reach your destination please give this to charity." With this they're giving the traveller their blessing that no harm will befall them.

This is one of many examples of the concept of 'shlichut', where we ask people to carry out good deeds on our behalf. The Talmud teaches, "Shlucho shel adam kemoto." – "One's representative is just like oneself."

That person becomes your 'yada arichta' – your extended arm. The concept of shlichut therefore has numerous blessings. It's great for those who are asking others to perform good deeds because it means that their output of goodness is increased. They don't have to carry out every single deed themselves, and those who carry out the deeds are blessed as a result.

The Torah, in Parshat Acharei Mot however, gives one notable exception to the concept of shlichut, of delegation. We're presented with laws concerning inappropriate sacrifices and the Torah tells us that somebody who brings such a sacrifice, "Dam yechasheiv laish hahu," – this wrongdoing "will be considered to be the act of the person who carried it out."

Says the Talmud: "Hu velo sholcho," – "It's that person's wrongdoing and not the wrongdoing of anyone who asked them to carry it out."

Here the Torah is letting us know that 'ein shlichut lidvar aveirah,' – you cannot have a representative to carry out something which is wrong. If you're performing a wrongdoing – it's on your own head. You can't blame anyone else for it.

So therefore let us take advantage of the concept of shlichut; let's ask people to perform good deeds on our behalf; let's increase all the output of the kindness and good that we perform in this world; let's increase blessings for our society – but let's never forget that when it comes to wrongdoing, no person should ever be allowed to give the excuse "I was only doing my duty. I was only obeying orders."

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#### **Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

##### **Man, as a Vessel of Holiness, is Never Alone** **Rabbi Aviad Sanders**

In previous portions the Torah told us that man was created in the image of God; that man was witness to Divine revelation; that man entered into an eternal covenant with God and received, in turn, an eternal expression of this covenant, relevant to all times.

However, from the moment of the Sin of the Golden Calf, and more notably in the Book of

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Vayikra, one cannot but feel that there is a shying away from the lofty ideas mentioned earlier. The Sin of the Golden Calf at Sinai elevated the status of the Levites, and more particularly the sons of Aharon, leaving the rest of the Israelites somewhat behind.

The Kohanim were the one who served in the sanctuary and wore special garments; the Levites performed special tasks; Moshe sets up his tent outside the main camp – all of these facts give a sense that the huge project that had begun with the creation of man in the image of God is slowly receding. Only a select few, an elite group, have retained their image of God.

The above sets the stage for the verses which appear at the beginning of our portion:

"And the Lord spoke unto Moshe saying: Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them: You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy."

God turns to all of Israel and commands them to be holy just as He is holy. It follows then that the connection between man and God has not been severed as we may have thought; God still belongs to any person who wishes to take on the challenge of holiness.

How is this challenge manifested? Later in the same chapter, we read of the following: the prohibition to spread gossip; the prohibition to hate another person and the prohibition to act in vengeance. We are also given a positive commandment of loving others: "And you shall love your neighbor like yourself."

Furthermore, we are also commanded to take care of the elderly – "And you shall honor the face of the old man" – and to treat social minorities – gerim or foreign residents – with respect (since we ourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt).

Holiness is also expressed through man's acknowledgement of the fact that he has no control over reality, nor ownership of his own body. Man must always remember that in every aspect of life, he is partner to God. Even the fruits of the trees he himself plants are not entirely his – he may not eat of these in the first few years of the tree's life. He may not blemish his body in any way, harm his flesh or even leave a lasting mark on his skin because man is God's partner in everything, and holiness is the manifestation of this partnership.

The message conveyed by Parshat Kedoshim is no less than jolting: every single Jew is called to conduct himself in his daily life as if he were a partner to God Himself. Yes, the individual is important; he carries the banner of holiness. This holiness is not only expressed in the awareness one has of this partnership with the Almighty, but also in the respect one shows others since they too were created in the image of God and, as such, are partners to God.

In fact, God did the same. He diminished His own Self and made room for us because He deemed us important. In much the same way that the Almighty made room for man, we express our holiness by making room for the other; for the person that is not me; for God Himself. In so doing, we acknowledge that we are not isolated entities.

This may very well be Judaism's greatest lesson about human reality. In some respects, it is Judaism's greatest gift to all of mankind: the recognition that man is a partner to God and, as such, man holds the banner of holiness.

When looking around, one often gets the feeling that the above notion has been forgotten. On the one hand, the world is full of people who try to impose their worldview on others with the aim of invalidating all other points of view. On the other hand, the world is filled with people who have despaired of others and believe in nobody. These people want to confine themselves to their small community, and are repulsed by anybody who doesn't lead a way of life identical to theirs.

The western world, in many respects, is the central axis of an entire culture that advocates the idea that all identities, nations and any collective definition ought to be blurred for the reason that there is no one true definition for anything. In fact, this culture, having despaired of any absolute truth, promotes an absolute truth of its own – there is no absolute truth nor any specific identity.

On the other hand, we are currently witnessing a war between the western world and cultures who wish to reclaim their past glory, and the latter's persistent fight against those who wish to prevent them from obtaining and re-experiencing this glory. In the name of this "glory of yore", they are even willing to kill others or die themselves. So much so, that anybody who attempts to foil their ultimate plan is considered worthy of death; any culture that attempts to prevent them from reclaiming their long-lost glory must be wiped out and erased.

The concept of kedusha, holiness, comes to fill the space between these two polarities. Holiness, as a worldview, wants to make the world and our reality better, not by blurring identities or refusing to acknowledge others; rather, by constantly being aware that we are partners to God and must upkeep the covenant between man and God. Just as the covenant is eternal, so is the partnership; however, it is also dynamic and is manifest differently in every generation.

The laws of war, as expounded upon in the Torah, are very different from the laws of war in contemporary times. Today, nobody would fathom killing 'every soul', including women and children, when going out to a milchemet mitzvah – a war that is necessary for survival. This would result in a terrible desecration of

God's name and would undermine the covenant, if anything. Rabbi Herzog wrote that in times of war the Jewish nation cannot conduct itself in a way that would be considered unethical by other nations, if only for the reason that the State of Israel came into being because the other nations gave their consent. If Israel were to engage in any conduct considered to be unethical, during times of war, this would, by definition, lead to a desecration of God's name in the eyes of the gentiles.

Notwithstanding the above, also in our own times, the laws of warfare are based on the same age-old principles: one calls out for peace and one tries to reach an agreement before going out to war. And if war is inevitable, one is guided by the following rules: guarding Israel from its enemies but maintaining holiness in one's camp and being extra cautious about maintaining ethical behavior. The principles are the same as they have always been, but they are manifest differently, in a manner befitting our own times. This is the true essence of living in holiness – the ability to safeguard the partnership with God forever.

For too long, holiness as a way of life was practiced inside the home only – and not without just cause. We were in exile for many years; we did not have equal rights where we lived; nobody wished to listen to what we had to say.

However, in our times, it is our duty to start spreading the light of Torah and what it means to live in holiness. We must engage in Tikkun Olam constantly. "Be holy" is the commandment we are given in Parshat Kedoshim, and it is the means to making the world a better place and impacting reality. This, in turn, will also reinforce our internal holiness. Being holy and conducting ourselves accordingly is the ultimate mission of our people and our generation on the road to a better future.

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### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah**

**by Rabbi Label Lam**

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#### **Do it Because I am Holy**

The second parsha in our reading this week is Parshas Kedoshim. "Be holy, because I am holy, Hashem your G-d." It sounds like a tall order. However, if G-d expects it from us it means we can do it. For many of the commandments we perform, we recite a blessing first. The text begins "You are the Source of all blessing Hashem, King of the world, Who \_made us holy with His commandments\_, and commanded us to..." Our holiness is through the performance of the mitzvos, the commandments. Let's see a selection of the commandments of this week's parsha.

"Each person should fear his mother and father." What is fearing parents? Don't sit in their place, don't contradict them, don't judge the correctness of their words, don't call them

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by their first name. A parent is permitted to forego this obligation we have toward them. Leave a corner of a field of standing crops for the poor. This applies to any food which keeps in storage, grows from the ground, is harvested at one time, and is stored. There is no minimum amount to leave, but the Rabbis said one should not leave less than 1/60th of one's crops.

Don't deny owing money. This applies to deposits left with you, loans, wages, stolen money, articles of others which you found. Don't hold back the wages of a worker. Even when one agrees to the debt, one should not hold the wages from the employee past the conventional or agreed upon time.

Don't put a stumbling block before the blind. This is a commandment (mitzvah) not to cause others to fall through deliberately giving bad advice. It also includes causing another person to sin, such as serving him non-kosher food, or causing him to desecrate the Sabbath.

Judge with righteousness. Both plaintiffs should be treated equally, not one standing and the other seated, or one speaking at length and the other given a short time to explain his side. Included in this mitzvah is to give people the benefit of the doubt.

One may not speak negatively about another person, or tell someone something negative someone else said about them, even if it is true.

One may not hold back from saving another person from danger. We must even try to help a person avoid a monetary loss.

One may not hate his fellow in his heart. The way to avoid transgressing this mitzvah is by expressing your anger to the person for what he did to you.

One may not embarrass others. This applies especially in public.

No taking revenge, and not holding a grudge. Revenge is "you didn't lend me your saw, and so I won't lend you my hammer." Holding a grudge is "here's my saw. I'm not like you."

Love your fellow. One must try to relate toward his fellow as he would relate to himself. For example, he should defend his fellow from others who seek to embarrass him, hurt him financially, or physically just as he would do for himself. It is a serious transgression to raise one self up by knocking others down.

Stand before age. This mitzvah even includes wise people who are not elderly, and elderly people even if they are not wise.

Weights and measures must be exact. This means that people who sell by weight and volume must have counterbalances, and other measurements which are correct by objective standards.

These are some of the mitzvos of parshas Kedoshim. They are the fabric of a holy people. We have a unique relationship with G-d. He tells us to be holy – why? – because I am holy.

**Something Different for a Change\***

The problem of tradition versus innovation is an ancient, complex, and yet ever relevant one. The issue has never been fully resolved, and especially in Jewish life we must face it again in every generation.

When does conformity with accepted custom shade off from cautious conservatism to a rigid reactionary stand? And when does the willingness to experiment move one from the ranks of the liberals to those of the radicals who are contemptuous of the inherited values of the past? When is submission to tradition an act of moral cowardice and an evasion of responsibility, a cop-out on independent thinking? And when is the desire for change a thoughtless lust for cheap sensationalism and trivial thrill? These are questions of the greatest importance, and honorable men and women have and do differ about them.

It would be foolish to attempt an exhaustive analysis of the point of view of Judaism on this question, but is instructive to look for some insights from within the heritage of Judaism.

A perusal of the first part of today's sidra impresses us with the Torah's powerful insistence upon observing every jot and tittle of the tradition. Thus, the Yom Kippur service of the High Priest in the Temple is set forth in the greatest detail, with constant and reiterated warnings that the slightest deviation from the prescribed ritual is a disaster, that any change is calamitous. Clearly, the Bible holds tradition and custom in the highest esteem.

And yet, here and there the Torah leaves us a hint which the Rabbis picked up and expanded, in order to complete the total picture by supplementing this valuation of tradition with another point of view. Thus, after describing the high point of Yom Kippur, when the High Priest has performed the service in the inner sanctum, we read, "And Aaron shall come to the Tent of Meeting and remove his linen garments which he wore when he came to the sanctuary, and he shall leave them there" (Leviticus 16:23). The Talmud (Pesachim 26a, and cited by Rashi) tells us that of the eight special garments that the High Priest wore for the Yom Kippur service, he was to remove four of them, those of white linen, and these required sequestering or burial. They could not be used again. He may not avail himself of these four garments on the following Yom Kippur.

Now, these priestly clothes were very costly linen garments. According to the mishna in Yoma (3:7), they were exceptionally expensive. Why, therefore, waste them? Why not put them aside for the following Yom Kippur? Why do not the Rabbis invoke the established halakhic principle (Yoma 39a) that, "The Torah is considerate of the material

means of Israelites" and does not want to spend Jewish money unnecessarily?

An answer has been suggested by Rabbi Mordechai HaKohen. With all the concern of the Torah for the prescribed ritual and the unchanging tradition, the Torah very much wanted us to avoid the danger of routine. It considered boredom and rote as poison to the spirit and soul. Therefore, whereas we must follow every step of the ritual, the High Priest must have a change of garments every Yom Kippur, in the hope that the outward novelty will inspire and evoke from within the High Priest an inner freshness and enthusiasm, and that these four garments, which must always be different and always be new, will remain a symbol to all Israel that boredom is a slow death for the spirit, that only renewal can guarantee life. We need something different for a change!

What I think is the authentic Jewish view on our problem of tradition and change is this dual approach, insisting upon the unchanging framework of action, the fixed pattern of activity being transmitted from generation to generation without the slightest deviation, but demanding at the same time that inwardly we always bring a new spirit, a new insight, a new intuition into what we are doing. Objectively there is to be only tradition; subjectively there must always be something different, some change, something new. In outward practice custom prevails; in inner experience, only novelty and growth.

We find this emphasis on internal novelty in all the branches of the Jewish tradition. The Halakha itself, which is so insistent upon preserving outward form, cautions us against merely rote observance of mitzvot to which we habituate ourselves. It is very important for every man and woman to learn how to give religious expression to the various aspects of one's life, but never must this be done thoughtlessly and mindlessly merely because it has become second nature for us. Every year we perform the same seder, but our tradition challenges us to pour new meaning into the old form. Every Jewish wife and mother lights the candles on Friday afternoon in the same way every week of her life. It is her great opportunity to offer her own personal, even wordless, prayer to her Creator. But every week there should be some novelty, some additional requests, some new insights and concern – perhaps for someone else's family. When we offer the blessing on bread after a meal, we recite the same words, but perhaps sometimes we ought to vary the melody (if we do sing it) in order to challenge us to rethink our gratitude to the Almighty for being allowed to be included in that small percentage of humanity that suffers from overeating rather than under-eating. Every morning we recite the morning blessings. If we would really hear what we are saying, it is possible that our service would take three times as long! We bless God who is "poke'ah ivrim," who makes the blind see. Only a short while ago we were

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sleeping, completely sightless. Then we wake up and look at the world around us. We ought to marvel, we ought to be amazed and stunned, at the great miracle of being able to see!

Ask those who cannot, whose eyesight is impaired, or whose vision is threatened, and you will appreciate once again what it is to wake up every morning and be able to see! We blessed Him that He is "matir asurim," He straightens up those who are bent over. We thank God that we are able to get up in the morning, difficult as it is, and indeed, when we think upon it, we ought to be suffused with a special light of thankfulness that we are not confined to bed, that we have the wherewithal to arise and go about our daily activities. Every word of prayer that we say, every expression of gratitude, ought to be completely new every morning. And indeed, this is true for objective reasons as well. Although the world looks like an old one, although the objects of nature are ancient and its laws timeless, nonetheless we believe that God "renews in His goodness every day the work of Creation." In that case, every morning we are indeed confronted with a brand new world – and therefore our reaction ought to be one of novelty and amazement and marveling.

The Kabbalistic tradition, as it came to us through Rabbi Isaac Luria, insisted that the same holds true for all of prayer. In prayer, perhaps above all else, we find the Jewish penchant for tradition and the acceptance of tried and tested formulae. Unlike most other peoples, especially in the Western world, our tefillot are the same every day, every Sabbath, every festival. And yet Rabbi Isaac Luria taught that each prayer must be unique in its essence, despite the identity of words. No two prayers are ever alike! Each prayer is offered up only once and cannot be truly repeated – provided that we pray in the right manner.

Hasidism made this the cornerstone of its whole theology. Thus, Rebbe Nachman Bratzlaver declared that, "If we shall be no better tomorrow than we are today, then why is tomorrow necessary at all?!" We may not use the same garments of this year for next Yom Kippur. There must always be something different, for a change in the life of the spirit is necessary to keep the mind and heart alive, healthy, and alert – to make each and every tomorrow unexpected, meaningful, exciting, and hence, necessary. There must be a change – and always in an upward direction.

Paradoxically, if we remain the same, we really are diminished. If we are stationery, then we are not stationery but we retrogress. In the life of Torah, the old rule (Sifre, Eikev 48) holds true – "If you abandon it for one day, it will abandon you for two days." Why is this so? Because life moves on, turbulently and inexorably. Events are never static; we have to run to keep in place.

This is especially true with the mitzva of tzedaka, charity. I am often frustrated when I

appeal for charitable contributions and I hear the answer to my appeal in the form of a question: "Well, what did I give last year?" In all other aspects of life, we accommodate ourselves to a precipitate change in the economy. Despite an ephemeral boycott or occasional whimper or complaint, we adjust soon enough to paying more for beef and onions, for haircuts and services. But when it comes to charity – rarely do we keep pace. "What did I give last year" becomes the introduction to and excuse for repeating the same pledge this year. This question and this pledge form a philanthropic litany which is destructive of our greatest communal institutions.

But this is not the way it should be. We may not use the same garments of this year for next Yom Kippur. Just as in matters of prayer or observance or religious experience, so in matters of charity we must grow Jewishly. Here too there must be something different for a change. Today must not be the same as yesterday, tomorrow not the same as today, this year not the same as last year.

Perhaps all that I have been saying is summed up in the last will and testament of one of the greatest Jewish translators of the Middle Ages, Rabbi Judah Ibn Tibbon, when he left the following advice to his son, Rabbi Samuel: "Of what good is life if my actions today are no different from what they were yesterday?" And conversely, how wonderful can life be if every day is new, if every day is different, if every day there is a change for the better.

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