

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Acharei-Kedoshim

Leviticus 16:1-20:27

Torah Reading for Week of April 14-20, 2002

This week's Torah reading consists of two Parshiot — *Acharei Mot* ("After the Death") and *Kedoshim* ("Holy Ones").

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, who "came close to G-d and died", G-d tells Moses to instruct Aaron

...that he should not enter, at all times, into the holy, inside the Parochet (the "veil" that separated the "Holy of Holies" from the rest of the Sanctuary), before the Kaporet (cover) that is upon the Ark—lest he die; for in a cloud I appear above the Kaporet...

Only on the holiest day of the year—Yom Kippur—and after bringing a series of specially ordained

offerings, should the Kohen Gadol ("high priest") purify himself, put on white linen garments, and enter the chamber housing the Ark:

He shall take a pan-full of fiery coals from atop the altar that is before G-d, and the fill of his hands of finely-ground ketoret (incense), and bring them inside the Parochet.

And he shall place the ketoret upon the fire before G-d; and the cloud of incense shall cover up the Kaporet that is on [the Ark of] the Testament...

Our Parshah then goes on to detail the service performed by the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur to secure atonement for his people. Among the offerings of the day were two male goats:

And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for G-d, and one lot for Azazel.

The goat that which the lot determined to be "For G-d" is brought as an offering and its blood is sprinkled in the Holy of Holies. The one deemed for "Azazel" is

Commentary

AFTER THE DEATH OF THE TWO SONS OF AARON (LEVITICUS 16:1)

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria would explain this with a parable: A sick person was visited by a physician, who said to him: "Do not eat cold food and do not lie in the damp, lest you die." There then came a second physician who said to him: "Do not eat cold food and do not lie in the damp, lest you die as so-and-so died." The second one influences him more than the first. Thus it says: "After the death of the two sons of Aaron."

(Rashi)

WHO CAME CLOSE TO G-D AND DIED (16:1)

They approached the supernal light out of their great love of the Holy, and thereby died. Thus they died by "divine kiss" such as experienced by the perfectly righteous; it is only that the righteous die when the divine kiss approaches them, while they died by their approaching it... Although they sensed their own demise, this did not prevent them from drawing near to G-d in attachment, delight, delectability, fellowship, love, kiss and sweetness, to the point that their souls ceased from them.

(Ohr HaChaim)

AND HE SHALL BATHE HIS FLESH IN WATER, AND CLOTHE HIMSELF IN THEM (16:4)

On that day, the Kohen Gadol immersed (in a mikvah) five times, and washed his hands and feet from the *kiyyor* ("basin") that stood before the Sanctuary ten times: each time he changed his clothes, he was required to immerse once, and wash twice (once before removing the first set of

clothes, and again after dressing in the second set).

For there were five sets of services performed by him on that day: 1) The regular morning services, performed in the "golden garments" (worn by the Kohen Gadol throughout the year). 2) The special services of the day (reciting the confession over the Yom Kippur offerings, casting the lots, entering the Holy of Holies to offer the *ketoret* and to sprinkle the blood of the Yom Kippur offerings)—performed in the linen garments. 3) The two rams brought as "ascending offerings" and the day's *musaf* offerings—in the golden garments. 4) returning to the Holy of Holies to remove the pan of burning incense—in linen garments. 5) the regular afternoon services—in the golden garments.

(Talmud, tractate Yoma)

TWO HE-GOATS (16:5)

They should be identical in appearance, height and price, and should be acquired together.

(Talmud, Yoma 62b)

AND SO SHALL HE DO FOR THE TENT OF MEETING, WHICH DWELLS AMONGST THEM IN THE MIDST OF THEIR DEFILEMENT (16:16)

Also when they are in a state of defilement, the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) dwells with them.

(Talmud; Rashi)

"FOR ON THIS DAY, HE SHALL ATONE FOR YOU (16:30)

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"dispatched by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness; and the goat shall bear upon it all their sins to a barren land."

And he shall make atonement for the holy place, over the defilements of the children of Israel, over their transgressions in all their sins. And so shall he do for the Tent of Meeting, which dwells amongst them in the midst of their defilement...

And this shall be an everlasting statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, the home born or the stranger that sojourns among you.

For on this day will He will atone for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before G-d... once a year.

The Parshah of Acharei also warns against bringing offerings to G-d anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and other deviant sexual behaviors.

Holiness and Love

The Parshah of Kedoshim begins with G-d's statement to the people of Israel:

You shall be holy, for I, G-d your G-d, am holy.

G-d then proceeds to command numerous mitzvot, many of which are cardinal precepts of Torah law. E.g.,:

Every man shall fear his mother and his father and keep my Sabbaths; I am G-d your G-d.

Commentary

On Yom Kippur, the day itself atones... as it is written, For on this day... shall atone for you."

(Maimonides)

SPEAK TO ALL THE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND SAY TO THEM: YOU SHALL BE HOLY... (LEVITICUS 19:2)

Rabbi Chiyya taught: This section was spoken in the presence of a gathering of the whole community, because most of the essential principles of the Torah are appended to it.

Rabbi Levi said: Because the Ten Commandments are included therein:

- 1) "I am the L-rd your G-d," and here it is written, "I am the L-rd your G-d" (19:3, *et al*).
- 2) "You shall have no other gods before me," and here it is written, "Nor make to yourselves molten gods" (19:4).
- 3) "You shall not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain," and here it is written, "And you shall not swear by My name falsely" (19:12).
- 4) "Remember the Sabbath day", and here it is written, "And keep My sabbaths" (19:3).
- 5) "Honor your father and your mother," and here it is written, "Every man shall fear his mother and his father" (19:3).
- 6) "You shall not murder," and here it is written, "You shall not stand by the blood of your fellow" (19:16).

7) "You shall not commit adultery," and here it is written, "Both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (19:10).

8) "You shall not steal," and here it is written, "You shall not steal, [neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another]" (19:11).

9) "You shall not bear false witness," and here it is written, "You shall not go about as a talebearer" (19:16).

10) "You shalt not covet... any thing that is your fellow's," and here it is written, "Love your fellow as yourself" (19:18).

(Midrash Rabbah)

SPEAK TO ALL THE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND SAY TO THEM: YOU SHALL BE HOLY... (19:2)

The easiest thing is to hide from the world and its follies, seclude oneself in a room, and be a holy hermit. What the Torah desires, however, is that a person should be part and parcel of "all the congregation of the children of Israel"—and be holy.

(Alshich)

YOU SHALL BE HOLY (19:2)

Sanctify yourself also regarding that which is permissible to you.

(Talmud, Yevamot 20a)

The meaning of this is that since the Torah has warned against forbidden sexual relations and forbidden foods, while permitting relations with one's wife and eating meat and wine, the lustful person can find a place to wal-

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Turn not to idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods; I am G-d your G-d...

You shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

And you shall not swear by my name falsely; neither shall you profane the name of your G-d. I am G-d.

You shall not defraud your neighbor, neither rob him; the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with you all night until the morning.

Charity to the needy,

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest... You shall leave them for the poor and stranger; I am G-d your G-d.

and equality before the law,

You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment—you shall not give special consideration to a poor man, nor honor the great; in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

Also in our Parshah: the injunction not to “stand by your brother’s blood” (i.e., the duty to “get involved” when another’s life is threatened); the duty to “rebuke your fellow” over his wrongdoing rather than to “hate your brother in your heart”; prohibitions against slander and gossip, taking revenge and bearing a grudge.

Kedoshim also contains the dictum which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called “a cardinal principle of Torah” and of which Hillel said, “This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary”:

Commentary

low in fornication with his wife or wives and be of “the guzzlers of wine and the gluttons of meat”, and converse at will of all licentious things (since no prohibition against this is specified in the Torah). He can be a hedonist with the Torah’s permission. Therefore, after enumerating the things which it forbids entirely, the Torah says: “Be holy.” Constrain yourself also in that which is permitted.

(Nachmanides)

The first dictum we heard from the Rebbe (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi) was: “What is forbidden, one must not; what is permitted, one need not.”

(Rabbi Mordechai of Horadok)

EVERY MAN SHALL FEAR HIS MOTHER AND HIS FATHER (19:3)

And in Exodus 20:12 it says, “Honor your father and your mother.” For it is revealed and known to G-d that a person adores his mother more than his father, and that he fears his father more than his mother. G-d therefore set the honor of one’s father first, and the fear of one’s mother first, to emphasize that one must honor and fear them both equally.

(Talmud, Kiddushin 31a)

EVERY MAN SHALL FEAR HIS MOTHER AND HIS FATHER AND KEEP MY SABBATHS; I AM G-D YOUR G-D (19:3)

Although I have commanded you to fear your father, if he tells you to violate the Shabbat—or to transgress any other mitzvah—do not heed him; for

“I am G-d your G-d”—both you and your father are obligated to honor Me.

(Rashi; Talmud)

TURN NOT TO IDOLS, NOR MAKE TO YOURSELVES MOLTEN GODS (19:4)

At first, they will be just “idols”; but if you turn to them, you will end up making them “gods”.

(Rashi)

YOU SHALL NOT GO ABOUT AS A TALEBEARER AMONGST YOUR PEOPLE; YOU SHALL NOT STAND BY YOUR FELLOW’S BLOOD (19:16)

Said Rabbi Yitzchak: One who bears tales is a murderer, as it is written: “You shall not go about as a talebearer amongst your people; you shall not stand by your fellow’s blood”

(Tosefta, Drech Eretz 6:3)

Evil talk kills three people: the speaker, the listener, and the one who is spoken of.

(Talmud, Erachin 15a)

The speaker obviously commits a grave sin by speaking negatively of his fellow. The listener, too, is a partner to this evil. But why is the one who is spoken of affected by their deed? Are his negative traits worsened by the fact that they are spoken of?

Indeed they are. A person may possess an evil trait or tendency, but his quin-

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Love your fellow as yourself.

In addition to these "mitzvot between man and man," there are "mitzvot between man and G-d" such as the chokim (supra-rational divine decrees) against hybrid cross-breeding of different animal species, hybrid planting of plant species, and shaat-nez — hybrid use of wool and linen in a garment..

Also,

When you shall come into the land, and shall

have planted all manner of trees for food, then you shall reckon their fruit as orlah ("uncircumcised"). Three years shall it be as orlah unto you: it shall not be eaten.

The fourth year's produce is to be taken to Jerusalem, where it is eaten in sanctity; "its fruit shall be holy for praise-giving to G-d." Only "in the fifth year shall you eat of its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase."

And,

You shall not round the corners of [the hair of] your heads; neither shall you destroy the corners of your beard...

Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot; lest the land fall to harlotry, and the land become full of foulness....

Commentary

tessential goodness, intrinsic to every soul, strives to control it, conquer it, and ultimately eradicate its negative expressions and redirect it as a positive force. But when this evil is spoken of, it is made that much more manifest and real. By speaking negatively of the person's trait or deed, the evilspeakers are, in effect, defining it as such; with their words, they grant substance and validity to its negative potential.

But the same applies in the reverse: speaking favorably of another, accentuating his or her positive side, will aid him to realize himself in the manner that you have defined him.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

The Psalmist compares slanderous talk to "Sharp arrows of the warrior, coals of broom" (Psalms 120:4). All other weapons smite from close quarters, while the arrow smites from the distance. So is it with slander: it is spoken in Rome and kills in Syria. All other coals, when extinguished, are extinguished without and within; but coals of broom are still burning within when they are extinguished without. So is it with words of slander: even after it seems that their effects have been put out, they continue to smolder within those who heard them. It once happened that a broom tree was set on fire and it burned eighteen months—winter, summer and winter.

(Midrash Rabbah)

Evil talk is like an arrow. A person who unsheathes a sword can regret his intention and return it to its sheath. But the arrow cannot be retrieved.

(Midrash Tehillim)

To what may the tongue be compared? To a dog tied with an iron chain and locked in a room within a room within a room, yet when he barks the entire populace is terrified of him. Imagine if he were loose outside! So the tongue: it is secured behind the teeth and behind the lips, yet it does no end of damage. Imagine if it were outside!

(Yalkut Shimoni)

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov once instructed several of his disciples to embark on a journey. The Chassidic leader did not tell them where to go, nor did they ask; they allowed Divine Providence to direct their wagon where it may, confident that the destination and purpose of their trip would be revealed in due time.

After traveling for several hours, they stopped at a wayside inn to eat and rest. Now the Baal Shem Tov's disciples were pious Jews who insisted on the highest standards of *kashrut*; when they learned that their host planned to serve them meat in their meal, they asked to see the *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) of the house, interrogated him as to his knowledge and piety and examined his knife for any possible blemishes. Their discussion of the *kashrut* standard of the food continued throughout the meal, as they inquired after the source of every ingredient in each dish set before them.

As they spoke and ate, a voice emerged from behind the oven, where an old beggar was resting amidst his bundles. "Dear Jews," it called out, "are you as careful with what comes out of your mouth as you are with what enters into it?"

The party of Chassidim concluded their meal in silence, climbed onto their wagon and turned it back toward Mezhibuzh. They now understood the purpose for which their Rebbe had dispatched them on their journey that morning.

YOU SHALL NOT GO ABOUT AS A TALEBEARER (19:16)

A man once came to see Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch and proceeded to portray himself as a villain of the worst sort. After describing at length his moral and spiritual deficiencies, he begged the Rebbe to help him overcome his evil character.

"Surely," said the Rebbe, "you know how grave is the sin of *lashon harah*, speaking ill of a human being. Nowhere, to my knowledge, does it say that it is permissible to speak *lashon harah* about oneself."

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*You shall rise up before the white-haired,
and honor the face of the old man, and fear
your G-d; I am G-d.*

And if a stranger sojourn with you in your land, you shall not wrong him... and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am G-d your G-d.

A severe warning is issued for those who assume the practice of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan to sacrifice their children to the pagan god Molekh.

Kedoshim concludes with a list of prohibitions against illicit sexual relations: adultery, various incestuous relationships (a father's wife, a daughter-in-law, an aunt, a sister, a sister-in-law, etc.), homosexuality, bestiality, relations with a menstruating woman.

And you shall be holy to Me, for I, G-d, am holy, and I have separated you from the nations, that you should be Mine.

Commentary

YOU SHALL NOT STAND BY YOUR FELLOW'S BLOOD (19:16)

From where do we know that if one sees his fellow drowning in a river, being dragged off by a wild animal or attacked by robbers, that one is obligated to save him? From the verse, "You shall not stand by your fellow's blood."

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 73a)

YOU SHALL NOT HATE YOUR BROTHER IN YOUR HEART; REBUKE, REBUKE YOUR FELLOW, BUT DO NOT INCUR A SIN ON HIS ACCOUNT (19:17)

If a person is wronged by another, he should not hate him and remain silent, as is said in regard to the wicked, "And Absalom did not speak to Amnon, neither good nor evil, for Absalom hated Amnon" (II Samuel 13:22). Rather, it is a mitzvah for him to make this known to him, and say to him, "Why did you do this-and-this to me? Why did you offend me in this way?," as it is written: "Rebuke, rebuke your fellow." And if that person expresses regret and asks him for forgiveness, he should forgive him...

One who sees that his fellow has sinned, or is following an improper path, it is a mitzvah to bring him back to the proper path and to inform him that he sins by his bad actions, as it is written: "Rebuke, rebuke your fellow."

When one rebukes one's fellow, whether it is regarding matters between the two of them or regarding matters between that person and G-d, he should rebuke him in private. He should speak to him gently and softly, and should tell him that he is doing this for his own good, so that he may merit the World to Come.

If that person accepts [the rebuke], good; if not, he should rebuke him a second time and a third time. He should continue to rebuke him to the point that the sinner strikes him and says to him, "I refuse to listen."

Whoever has the ability to rebuke and does not do so shares in the guilt for the sin, since he could have prevented it...

One who is wronged by his fellow but does not desire to rebuke him or speak to him about it at all because the offender is a very coarse person, or a disturbed person, but chooses instead to forgive him in his heart, bearing him no grudge nor rebuking him, this is the manner of the pious. The Torah's objection [to remaining silent] is only when he harbors animosity.

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of Character, ch. 6)

REBUKE, REBUKE YOUR FELLOW (19:17)

Our sages have said: "Words that come from the heart, enter the heart." It therefore follows that if you seek to correct a failing of your fellow and are unsuccessful, the fault lies not with him, but with yourself. Had you truly been sincere, your words would certainly have had an effect.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

REBUKE, REBUKE YOUR FELLOW (19:17)

Why is the word "rebuke" repeated? Because first you must rebuke yourself.

(The Chassidic Masters)

Your fellow is your mirror. If your own face is clean, the image you perceive will also be flawless. But should you look upon your fellow man and see a blemish, it is your own imperfection that you are encountering — you are being shown what it is that you must correct within yourself.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

REBUKE, REBUKE YOUR FELLOW (19:17)

On one occasion, Rabbi Aaron of Belz was informed that one of the town's residents had desecrated the Shabbat. He immediately ordered both the informer and the Shabbat violator to appear before him.

"I order you to donate two pounds of candles to the synagogue," said Rabbi Aaron to the informer, "in order to atone for the fact that you spoke nega-

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tively of a fellow Jew.”

“And you,” said the Rebbe to the second man, “I fine one pound of candles, for being the cause of your fellow Jews speaking negatively of another Jew.”

REBUKE, REBUKE YOUR FELLOW (19:17)

Said Rabbi Ilaah in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon: Just as it is a mitzvah for a person to say what will be accepted, it is a mitzvah to refrain from saying things that will not be accepted.

Rabbi Abba said: Indeed, it is an obligation [to act thus], as it is written (Proverbs 9:8): “Do not rebuke a fool, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.”

(Talmud, Yevamot 65b)

YOU SHALL NOT TAKE VENGEANCE NOR BEAR ANY GRUDGE (19:18)

What is revenge and what is bearing a grudge? If a person said to his fellow, “Lend me your sickle,” and he replied “No”, and on the following day the second person comes to the first and says, “Lend me your ax,” and he replies: “I will not lend it to you, just as you would not lend me your sickle”—that is revenge..

And what is bearing a grudge? If one person says to his fellow, “Lend me your ax,” and he replies, “No”, and on the morrow the second asks, “Lend me your garment,” and the first answers: “Here it is. I am not like you who would not lend me”—that is bearing a grudge.

(Talmud, Yoma 23a)

YOU SHALL NOT TAKE VENGEANCE NOR BEAR ANY GRUDGE AGAINST ANY OF YOUR PEOPLE; AND YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF (19:18)

How does one avoid acting vengefully? One should think: If a person were cutting meat and the knife cut his hand, would that hand cut the first hand in return?

(Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:4)

LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF (19:18)

Rabbi Akiva said: This is a cardinal principle of the Torah.

(Midrash Rabbah)

A gentile came before Shammai and said to him, “I wish to convert to Judaism, on the condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.” Shammai drove him away with the builder’s cubit which was in his hand. When he came before Hillel, Hillel said to him: “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor. This is the entire Torah; the rest is the

commentary—go and learn it.”

(Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

Why did Hillel say that this is “the entire Torah”? Granted that it is the essence of all mitzvot governing our behavior “between man and man”; but the Torah also includes many mitzvot that are in the realm of “between man and G-d.” In what way is the mitzvah to “Love your fellow as yourself” the essence of mitzvot such as praying, or ceasing work on Shabbat?

The explanation can be found in the answer to another question: How is it possible to love another “as yourself”? Are not self and fellow two distinct entities, so that however closely they may be bound, the other will always be other, and never wholly as the self?

As physical beings, one’s self and one’s fellow are indeed two distinct entities. As spiritual beings, however, they are ultimately one, for all souls are of a single essence, united in their source in G-d. As long as one regards the physical self as the true “I” and the soul as something this I “has”, one will never truly love the other “as oneself.” But if the soul is the “I” and the body but its tool and extension, one can come to recognize that “self” and “fellow” are but two expressions of a singular essence, so that all that one desires for oneself, one equally desires for one’s fellow.

Otherwise stated, the endeavor to love one’s fellow as oneself is the endeavor to cultivate one’s own spiritual identity; to see the soul and spirit as the true and ultimate reality, and the body and the material as extraneous and subservient to it.

This is the entire Torah.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF (19:18)

A soul might descend to earth and live seventy or eighty years for the sole purpose of doing a favor for another—a spiritual favor, or even a material favor.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

When two people meet, something positive must result for a third.

(Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch)

LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF (19:18)

Love of a fellow is the first gate leading into the palace of G-d.

To love a fellow is to love G-d. For “You are children unto the Lord your G-d” (Deuteronomy 14:1); one who loves a father loves his children.

“Love your fellow as yourself” is an elaboration and elucidation upon “And you shall love the L-rd your G-d” (Deuteronomy 6:5). When one loves one’s fellow one loves G-d, for one’s fellow contains within himself a “part of G-d above” (Job 31:2). By loving one’s fellow, the innermost part of him, one loves G-d.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

The three loves—love of G-d, love of Torah and love of one’s fellow—are one. One cannot differentiate between them, for they are of a single essence. And since they are of a single essence, each one embodies all three.e.

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So if you see a person who has a love of G-d but lacks a love of Torah and a love of his fellow, you must tell him that his love of G-d is incomplete. And if you see a person who has only a love for his fellow, you must strive to bring him to a love of Torah and a love of G-d—that his love toward his fellows should not only be expressed in providing bread for the hungry and water for the thirsty, but also to bring them close to Torah and to G-d.

When we will have the three loves together, we will achieve the Redemption. For just as this last Exile was caused by a lack of brotherly love, so shall the final and immediate Redemption be achieved by love for one's fellow.

(From the words spoken by the Lubavitcher Rebbe immediately following his formal acceptance of the leadership of Chabad-Lubavitch in 1951)

LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF (19:18)

One must love the lowliest of men as much as the greatest Torah scholar.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

Three great Chassidic leaders were famous for their *ahavat yisrael* ("love of a fellow Jew"): Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, and Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli.

Rabbi Zusha was a living example of the maxim that "Love covers up all iniquities" (Proverbs 10:12). What the ordinary observer would perceive as a glaring deficiency, or even an outright sin, would not "register" in his holy eyes and mind. Rabbi Zusha was simply incapable of seeing anything negative in a fellow Jew.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's *ahavat yisrael* found expression in his incessant efforts as an advocate for the people of Israel. Unlike Rabbi Zusha, he was not blind to their misdeeds and failings; but he never failed to "judge every man to the side of merit" to find a justification, and even a positive aspect, in their behavior. (A typical story tells of how, upon noticing a wagon driver who was greasing his wheels while reciting his morning prayers, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak lifted his eyes to Heaven and cried: "Master of the Universe! Behold the piety of Your children! Even as they go about their daily affairs, they do not cease to pray to You!")

But the Baal Shem Tov's love ran deeper yet. To him, *ahavat yisrael* was not the refusal to see the deficiencies of a fellow, or even the endeavor to transform them into merits, but an unequivocal love regardless of their spiritual state. He loved the most iniquitous transgressor with the same boundless love with which he loved the greatest *tzaddik*; he loved them as G-d loves them as a father loves his children, regardless of who and what they are.

LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF (19:18)

I learned the meaning of love from two drunks whose conversation I once overheard.

The first drunk said: "I love you."

"No you dont," replied the other.

"Yes, yes, I do. I love you with all my heart."

"No you dont. If you love me, why dont you know what hurts me?"

(Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev)

LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF (19:18)

Our sages have said: "Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place" (Ethics of the Fathers 2:4). Since the only person in whose place you can truly stand is yourself, this means that you are qualified to judge only yourself.

Regarding yourself, you must condemn your moral and spiritual failings and be critical of your every achievement. Regarding your fellow, however, you must employ a double standard: your love and esteem toward him should be amplified by every positive quality you see in him, and should not to be affected in the least by any seemingly negative things you might observe.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

When I was four years old, I asked my father: "Why did G-d make people with two eyes? Why not with one eye, just as we have been given a single nose and a single mouth?"

Said father: "There are things upon which one must look with a right eye, with affection and empathy; and there are things upon which one must look with a left eye—severely and critically. On one's fellow man, one should look with a right eye; on oneself, one should look with a left eye."

(Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch)

LOVE YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF (19:18)

The Torah commands to "Love your fellow as yourself." Why only as much as yourself?

Indeed, Chassidim have always maintained that the meaning of the verse is the very opposite of how it is commonly understood. Despite all that you know about yourself, the Torah is saying, you should try to love yourself as much as you love your fellow...

(Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch)

When you shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food... Three years shall it be "orlah" unto you: it shall not be eaten. On the fourth year, all its fruit shall be holy for praising to G-d. And in the fifth year shall you eat of its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase... (19:23-25)

Thus the fruit tree passes through all three basic Halachic (Torah-legal) states: the forbidden, the sanctified, and the permissible.

The fruit tree can therefore be seen as representative of the whole of creation, which likewise is divided among these three categories. There are, for example, foods that are forbidden to us (e.g., pork, meat with milk); foods whose consumption is a mitzvah—an act that sanctifies the food, elevating it as an object of the divine will (such as matzah on the *seder* night); and foods that are spiritually "neutral"—eating them is neither a transgression nor a sanctifying act. The same applies to clothes (the forbidden *shaatnez*; the mitzvah of *tzitzit*; and ordinary clothes); speech (gossip and slander; the holy talk of prayer and Torah study; talk of everyday matters); sexuality (adultery and incest; the mitzvah to "be fruitful and multiply"; ordinary marital life); money (thievery; charity; legal business dealings); and to every other area of life.

Otherwise stated: there are elements of our experience and environment that G-d commands us to reject and disavow; elements that we are empowered to sanctify by directly involving them in our relationship with G-d; and finally,

Acharei-Kedoshim

Leviticus 16:1-20:27

Torah Reading for Week of April 14-20, 2002

Commentary

there are elements which, even as they serve as the “supporting cast” for our fulfillment of G-d’s will (e.g. the food that provides us with the energy to pray), remain ordinary and mundane.

In light of this, would it not have been more appropriate for the three stages of the fruit tree to follow an order of increasing sanctity—i.e., the forbidden, followed by the permissible, and culminating in the holy? Instead, the Torah legislates three forbidden years, followed by a year in which the fruit is sacred and its consumption a mitzvah, after which the fruit becomes ordinary food! Even more surprising is the fact that the fruit of the fifth year is presented as the product and goal of the first four: for three years you shall abstain from a tree’s fruit, says the Torah, and on the fourth year you shall sanctify it, so that on the fifth year, “it may yield to you its increase.” Keep from transgression and sanctify the holy so that you should have a lot of ordinary fruit to eat!!

In truth, however, the ultimate purpose of our lives lies in the realm of the “ordinary”. Only a small percentage of the world’s leather is made into *tefillin*; only a small part of a community’s man-hours can be devoted to prayer and Torah-study. The greater part of our lives falls under the “spiritually neutral” category: elements that, even as they serve a life that is predicated on a commitment to the divine will, remain ordinary and mundane components of a material existence; elements whose positive function does not touch them deeply enough to impart to them the “holiness” that spells a manifest and tagible attachment to the Divine. But it is in this area that we most serve G-d’s desire for “a dwelling place in the lowly realms”—that the ordinary landscape of material life should be made hospitable to His presence. and subservient to His will..

(The Chassidic Masters)

YOU SHALL RISE BEFORE THE WHITE-HAIRED, AND HONOR THE FACE OF THE OLD MAN (19:32)

The Rabbis taught: I might think, even before an aged sinner; but the Torah uses the word *zakein* (“old man”), which refers to a sage... to one who has acquired wisdom...

But Issi ben Yehudah said: “You shall rise before the white-haired” implies any hoary head.

Said Rabbi Yochanan: The law follows Issi ben Yehudah. Rabbi Yochanan used to rise before the heathen aged, saying: “How many experiences have passed over these!”

(Talmud, Kiddushin 32b-33a)

The Torah considers old age a virtue and a blessing. It instructs to respect all elderly, regardless of their scholarship and piety, because the many trials and experiences that each additional year of life brings yield a wisdom

which the most accomplished young prodigy cannot equal.

This is in marked contrast to the prevalent attitude in the “developed” countries of today’s world, where old age is a liability. Youth is seen as the highest credential in every field from business to government, as a younger generation insists on “learning from their own mistakes” rather than building upon the life experience of their elders. At 50, a person is considered “over the hill” and is already receiving hints that his position would be better filled by someone twenty-five years his junior; in many companies and institutions, retirement is mandatory by age 65 or earlier.

Thus society dictates that one’s later years be marked by inactivity and decline. The aged are made to feel that they are useless if not a burden, and had best confine themselves to retirement villages and nursing homes. After decades of achievement, their knowledge and talent are suddenly worthless; after decades of contributing to society, they are suddenly undeserving recipients, grateful for every time the younger generation takes off from work and play to drop by for a half-hour chat and the requisite Fathers Day necktie.

On the surface, the modern-day attitude seems at least partly justified. Is it not a fact that a person physically weakens as he advances in years? True, the inactivity of retirement has been shown to be a key factor in the deterioration of the elderly; but is it still not an inescapable fact of nature that the body of a 70-year-old is not the body of a 20-year-old?

But this, precisely, is the point: is a person’s worth to be measured by his physical prowess? By the number of man-hours and inter-continental flights that can be extracted from him per week? Our attitude toward the aged reflects our very conception of “value.” If a person’s physical strength has waned while his sagacity and insight have grown, do we view this as an improvement or a decline? If a person’s output has diminished in quantity but has increased in quality, has his net worth risen or fallen?

Indeed, a twenty-year-old can dance the night away while his grandmother tires after a few minutes. But man was not created to dance for hours on end. Man was created to make life on earth purer, brighter and holier than it was before he came on the scene. Seen in this light, the spiritual maturity of the aged more than compensates for their lessened physical strength.

Certainly, the physical health of the body affects one’s productivity. Life is a marriage of body and soul, and is at its most productive when nurtured by a sound physique as well as a healthy spirit. But the effects of the aging process upon a person’s productivity are largely determined by the manner in which he regards this marriage and partnership. Which is the means and which is the end? If the soul is nothing more than an engine to drive the body’s procurement of its needs and aims, then the body’s physical weakening with age brings with it a spiritual deterioration as well—a descent into boredom, futility and despair. But when one regards the body as an accessory to the soul, the very opposite is the case: the spiritual growth of old age invigorates the body, enabling one to lead a productive existence for as long as the Almighty grants one the gift of life..

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

From the Chassidic Masters

WITHDRAWAL AND RETURN

1. *The Death of Nadav and Avihu*

Our Parshah begins with the verse: “And the L-rd spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near to the L-rd and they died” (as related in Leviticus 10, in the Parshah of Shmini). The final words, however present a difficulty. Why does the Torah add “and they died” when it has already said, “after the death of the two sons of Aaron?”

The Midrash, in giving an explanation of their death, cites the following explanations: They entered the Holy of Holies; they did not wear the priestly garments necessary for their service; they did not have children; and they did not marry. Our second question now arises: What is the source of the Midrashic account? Where, in the Torah, are these four faults alluded to?

Further: How can we suppose that Aaron’s two sons, Nadav and Avihu, were guilty of sin? The Midrash relates (based on Leviticus 10:3) that Moses said to Aaron, “Aaron, my brother, I knew that the Sanctuary would be sanctified by those who were beloved and close to G-d. Now I see that they — Nadav and Avihu — are greater than both of us.” If this was so, how could they have sinned?

2. *A Fatal Ecstasy*

There is a Chassidic explanation that Aaron’s two sons did not “sin” literally. Their “sin” was to allow their desire to cleave to G-d to mount to such an intensity that they died. Their bodies could no longer contain their souls. Thus the Torah says “when they drew near to the L-rd (with such passion that) they died.” And this was counted as a sin! For although a Jew must divest himself of material concerns, at the moment when he stands poised at the ultimate ecstasy of the soul, he must turn again to the work that the soul must do within a physical existence.

It is written in the *Ethics of the Fathers* (4:22): “Against your will you live.” Set against the desire of the soul to rise *beyond* the world, is its task of creating a dwelling-place for G-d *within* the world. Nadav and Avihu achieved the ecstasy but not the return. This was their sin and the reason for their death. They “drew

near to the L-rd and they died.” They allowed their spiritual passion override their this-worldly task. They went beyond the world and beyond life itself.

This act lies at the heart of each of the four faults which the Midrash ascribes to them.

They “entered the Holy of Holies,” the innermost reaches of the spirit, without thinking of their return to the outer world.

They “did not wear the (priestly) garments.” Their concern was to divest themselves of the world and to become purely spiritual. They forsook the necessary “garments” in which the word of G-d is clothed, the Mitzvot, the physical actions that sanctify a physical environment.

They “had no children” and “did not marry.” That is, they did not fulfill G-d’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” and to bring new souls into the world. They did the opposite. They *withdrew* their own souls from the world.

All their faults stemmed from a single misconception: that the Jew draws close to G-d by withdrawal instead of involvement. In fact, both are necessary. And that is why, at the point of the year when we are most powerfully taken out of the world — Yom Kippur — we begin the reading of the Torah from these verses, as a reminder of our ultimate task.

3. *Entrance and Exit*

Rashi explains that the command, “that he (Aaron) come not at all times into the holy place . . . (but) with this shall Aaron come into the holy place,” comes immediately after the statement of the death of his sons, to warn that his (and our) service of G-d should not be like that of Nadav and Avihu.

A question arises here. Can we really demand of a person at the point of ecstasy, that he return to his mundane role? If his experience is genuine, if he has reached the love of G-d “with all your might” and has broken through all barriers of separation between man and G-d, can he hold himself back at the very point of union, and re-immense himself in all the constraints of the human situation? Is there not an emotional incompatibility between the absolute abandonment of a person to G-d and a constant vigilance not to go too far?

The answer lies in how a person *begins* his spiritual journey. If he sets out with the intention of satisfying his *own* desires, however exalted they are, he will not wish to turn back from his private ecstasy to the needs of the world. But if he sets out in obedience to G-d’s command, knowing that though “You shall love the L-

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rd your G-d . . . with all your might,” nonetheless “He created (the world) not to be empty, he formed it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18), then within his ecstatic approach to G-d, the desire ultimately to return and sanctify the world will always be implicit.

There is a famous story in the Talmud. Four men entered the “Grove” (the mystical secrets of the Torah): Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher and Rabbi Akiva. Ben Azzai looked and died. Ben Zoma looked and was stricken (with madness). Acher mutilated the shoots (i.e., became an apostate). Rabbi Akiva “entered in peace and came out in peace.”

On the face of it, the important difference between Rabbi Akiva and the other three was in how he came out of the “Grove.” Why does the Talmud emphasize that he “entered in peace?”

But the truth is that how each of the four entered, determined how they emerged. Ben Azzai entered seeking ecstasy, not return; therefore he “looked and died.” (It is interesting to note that his Divine service was generally characterized by aspects of withdrawal — see Talmud, *Yevamot*, 63b; *Sotah*, 4b. Cf. *Shulchan Aruch Harav, Hilchot Talmud Torah*, beg. ch. 3, in *Kuntres Acharon.*)

But Rabbi Akiva entered “in peace,” in obedience to the Divine will and seeking to unite the higher and lower worlds. That is why he came out in peace. His intention of returning was implicit at the outset of his path to religious ecstasy.

This, too, was how Aaron was to enter the Holy of Holies, in fear, obedience and self-abnegation. And in this way he was able to “make atonement for himself and for his house” and to say a prayer for the sustenance of Israel, each of them acts of concern for the world.

4. Experience Into Action

All the Torah’s narratives have a teaching which is applicable to every Jew, not simply to the outstanding few. What, then, is the universal significance of the story of Nadav and Avihu? Surely not everyone can reach a level of ecstasy where one’s life is in danger. A few need the warning; but what of the many?

But every Jew is sometimes awakened to an intense

religious experience, especially on Shabbat and the Festivals, more particularly during the Ten Days of Repentance, and above all on Yom Kippur. He is for a while taken out of his daily routine, his normal anxieties, and inwardly rises beyond his usual mental confines.

It is at these times that he must remember that whatever he experiences when he enters this holy domain must be carried with him when he returns to his everyday world. He must not seek ecstasy for its own sake, but for the sake of the subsequent return. A religious experience must not be left as a memory; it must remain active in animating the whole of his life. Like Rabbi Akiva, he must enter and come out “in peace,” that is, bringing G-d and the world closer together in harmony.

5. The Blessing of G-d

This connection between the manner of entering and of leaving the realm of holiness, applies not only to the service of the Jew, but also to the material world itself. For all the Jew’s needs, material as well as spiritual, come to him directly from G-d: “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her produce...” (Leviticus 26:3-4). Only through his bond with G-d does the Jew receive his material needs. He who says “It will be well with me for I will walk in the stubbornness of my heart” is always in the last analysis proved mistaken.

And this is intimated in our Parshah, describing the procedure of the High Priest’s service. It was only after he had entered the Holy of Holies that he was able to pray for and secure the sustenance of the people.

So it is that the public world that the Jew inhabits, and the private world of his religious experience, are intrinsically related. For if he draws his experience into the world, the world is thereby sanctified by man and blessed by G-d.

From Torah Studies www.kehonline.com an adaptation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s talks by Britain’s Chief Rabbi, Dr. Jonathan Sacks

KETORET:

And he shall take a censer-full of burning coals from the altar, and the fill of his hands of finely-ground **ketoret**; and he shall bring [these] inside the curtain.

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And he shall place the ketoret upon the fire before G-d; and the cloud of the incense shall envelop the covering of the [Ark of] Testimony

Leviticus 16:12-13

Man's quest to serve his Creator is perpetual and all-consuming, and can be pursued by all people, at all times, and in all places. There was one event, however, that represented the apogee in the human effort to come close to G-d—an event that brought together the holiest day of the year, the holiest human being on earth, and the holiest place in the universe: on Yom Kippur the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) would enter the innermost chamber of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, to offer *ketoret* to G-d.

The offering of the *ketoret* was the most prestigious and sacred of the services in the Holy Temple. The *ketoret* was a special blend of eleven herbs and balms whose precise ingredients and manner of preparation were commanded by G-d to Moses. Twice a day, *ketoret* was burned on the golden altar that stood in the Temple. On Yom Kippur, in addition to the regular *ketoret* offerings, the *Kohen Gadol* would enter the Holy of Holies with a pan of smoldering coals in his right hand and a ladle filled with *ketoret* in his left; there, he would scoop the *ketoret* into his hands, place it over the coals, wait for the chamber to fill with the fragrant smoke of the burning incense, and swiftly back out of the room. The moment marked the climax of the Yom Kippur service in the Holy Temple.

Maimonides describes the function of the *ketoret* as the vanquishing of the unpleasant odors that might otherwise have pervaded the Holy Temple. Since many animals were slaughtered in the sacred place each day, their flesh butchered and burnt and their intestines cleaned, its smell would doubtless have been like the smell of a slaughterhouse.... Therefore G-d commanded that the *ketoret* be burned twice a day, each morning and afternoon, to lend a pleasing fragrance to [the Holy Temple] and to the garments of those who served in it.

But Maimonides words carry a significance that extends beyond their superficial sense. In the words of Rabbeinu Bechayei, G-d forbid that the great principle and mystery of the *ketoret* should be reduced to this mundane purpose.

Chassidic teaching explains that the animal sacrifices offered in the Holy Temple represent the persons offering of his own animal soul to G-d—the subjugation of his natural instincts and desires to the divine will. This is the deeper significance of the foul odor emitted by the sacrifices which the *ketoret* came to dispel: the animal soul of man, which is the basic drive, common to every living creature, for self-preservation and self-enhancement, possesses many positive traits which can be directed toward gainful and holy ends; but it is also the source of many negative and destructive traits. When a person brings his animal self to the Temple of G-d and offers what is best and finest in it upon the altar, there is still the foul odor—the selfishness, the brutality and the materiality of the animal in man—that accompanies the process. Hence the burning of the *ketoret*, which possessed the unique capability to sublimate the evil odor of the animal soul within its heavenly fragrance.

Essence and Utility

This, however, still does not define the essence of the *ketoret*. For if the more external parts of the Temple might be susceptible to the foul odor emitted by the animal souls offered there, the Holy of Holies was a sanctum of unadulterated holiness and perfection; no animal sacrifices were offered there, for this part of the Temple was exclusively devoted to sheltering the Ark of Testament that held the tablets upon which G-d had inscribed the Ten Commandments. If the garments (i.e., character and behavior) of the ordinary priest might be affected by the negative smell of the slaughtered beasts he handled, this was certainly not the case with the *Kohen Gadol*, the greatest of his brethren in the fraternity of divine service. If every day of the year the scent of evil hovers at the periphery of even the most positive endeavor, Yom Kippur is a day in which there is no license for the forces of evil to incriminate. If the *ketoret* was offered by the *Kohen Gadol* in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, its ultimate function could not be the sublimation of evil.

The sublimation of evil is something that only the *ketoret* can achieve, but this is not the sum of its purpose and function. The word *ketoret* means bonding; the essence of the *ketoret* is the pristine yearning of the soul of man to cleave to G-d—a yearning that emanates from the innermost sanctum of the soul and is thus free of all constraints and restraints, of all that inhibits and limits us when we relate to something with the more external elements of our being..

Its purity and perfection are what give the *ketoret* the

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power to sweeten the foulest of odors, but dealing with evil is not what it is all about. On the contrary, its highest expression is in the utterly evil-free environment of the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

Bringing the Past in Line

Today, the Holy Temple no longer stands in Jerusalem, and the *Kohen Gadol* enters the Holy of Holies only in our recitation of the account of the Yom Kippur Temple service in the prayers of the Holy Day and in our vision of a future Yom Kippur in the rebuilt Temple. But the *ketoret* remains a basic component of our service of G-d in general, and of our observance of Yom Kippur in particular. We are speaking, of course, of the spiritual *ketoret*, which exists within the human soul as the power of *teshuvah*.

Like the incense that burned in the Holy Temple, the manifest function of *teshuvah* is to deal with negative and undesirable things. On the day-to-day, practical level, *teshuvah* is repentance—a response to wrongdoing, a healing potion for the ills of the soul. But *teshuvah* is also the dominant quality of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. Obviously, there is more to *teshuvah* than the rectification of sin.

The word *teshuvah* means return: return to pristine beginnings, return to the intrinsic perfection of the soul. For the essence of the soul of man, which is a spark of G-dliness, is immune to corruption. The inner self of man remains uninvolved in the follies of the ego, untouched by the outer self's enmeshment in the material and the mundane. *Teshuvah* is the return to one's true self, the cutting through of all those outer layers of misguided actions and distorted priorities to awaken one's true will and desire.

This explains how *teshuvah* achieves atonement for past sins. *Teshuvah* enables the sinner to reconnect with his own inherent goodness, with that part of himself which never sinned in the first place. In a sense, he has now acquired a new self, one with an unblemished past; but this new self is really his own true self come to light, while his previous, corrupted self was but an external distortion of his true being.

Only *teshuvah* has such power over the past; only *teshuvah* can undo a negative deed. But this is only one of the uses of the power of return. *Teshuvah* is not only

for sinners, but also for the holiest person in the holiest time and the holiest place. For even the perfectly righteous individual needs to be liberated from the limitations of the past.

Even the perfectly righteous individual is limited—limited because of knowledge not yet acquired, insights still unearned, feelings yet to be developed, attainments still unachieved; in a word, limited by time itself and the tyranny of its one way only law. As we advance through life, we conquer these limits, gaining wisdom and experience and refining and perfecting our character. But is our ability to grow and achieve limited to the future only? Is the past a closed frontier?

When we adopt the inward-seeking approach of *teshuvah* in everything we do, we need not leave an imperfect past behind at the waysides of our lives. In a *teshuvah* state, when we learn something new, we uncover the deeper dimension of our self which was always aware of this truth; when we refine a new facet of our personality, we bring to light the timeless perfection of our soul. Never satisfied in merely moving forward, our search for our own true self remakes the past as well.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
www.therebbe.org; adapted by Yanki Tauber,
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A HISTORY OF LOVE

Man, by nature, is a selfish creature. Even in his relationships with others he tends to focus primarily on himself or, at most, on his self-colored perception of his fellow. “Love” is the endeavor to transcend this intrinsic selfishness and truly relate to one's fellow, to be sensitive to and devoted to his/her needs as an individual distinct of oneself and one's own stake in the relationship.

And yet, when the Torah speaks of the mitzvah (Divine commandment) to “Love your fellow as yourself” it does so in the context of man's duty to influence, and even change, the behavior and nature of his fellow man. In Leviticus 19 (verses 18-19), the Torah commands:

Do not hate your brother in your heart; repeatedly rebuke your fellow, and do not attribute sin to him. Do not take revenge, or harbor hatred toward your people, and love your fellow as yourself; I am G-d.

As the commentaries explain, there are two possible

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reactions a person can have toward a fellow who has wronged him, or whom he sees behaving in a morally deficient manner: 1) he can despise him in his heart, regarding him as a “sinner” and perhaps even persecute him for his “sins”; 2) he can rebuke him in the effort to convince him of the folly of his ways and seek to influence him to change them. The path of love, says the Torah, is not to “hate your brother in your heart” but to “repeatedly rebuke” him and seek to better him.

Obviously, the desire to influence is consistent with the idea of love. No one would stand by as a loved one suffers hunger or is threatened by violence; no less so, if one sees someone he loves suffering from spiritual malnutrition or moral blindness, he will make every effort to reach out to him, to enlighten him, to offer guidance and assistance. But this aspect of loving behavior carries an inherent paradox. On the one hand, the endeavor to influence and change implies a departure from self and concern with the well-being of the other. On the other hand, it implies a seemingly selfish view of the other: a rejection of other as he is and a desire to impose one’s own perception of what is good for him upon him.

Four Biblical Prototypes

An exploration of the history of humanity, as recounted in the Torah, reveals four figures who personified four different points of reference on the relationship between self and fellow.

Each of these individuals was considered the most righteous of his generation. Thus, their lives can be seen to reflect four stages in the spiritual development of humanity — four stages in the movement from an instinctive selfhood toward the complete abnegation of self and self-interest in relating to others. Our examination of this process will also shed light on the acceptance/non-acceptance dilemma inherent in the love relationship.

The first of these four outstanding individuals was Enoch, a great-great-great-great-grandson of Adam, who was born in the year 622 from creation (3139 before the common era). By his time, humanity had abandoned the One G-d of their fathers and had succumbed to idolatry and pagan perversity. Only Enoch still “walked with G-d.”

But Enoch’s righteousness was wholly selfish: he was preoccupied only with the refinement and perfection of his own spiritual self. The Midrash even

relates that, for many years, he disassociated himself from his corrupt generation and secluded himself in a cave.

Not only did Enoch fail to have a lasting impact on his society, but he was ultimately in danger of being influenced by their corrupt behavior. This is why Enoch died at the “tender young age” of 365 (compared with the 800 and 900-year life spans of his contemporaries): “G-d took him to Himself” before his time, lest the only righteous man of the generation also be lost.

For such is the relationship of an individual with his environment: there is no sustained equilibrium. Where there is contact there is a flow, in one direction or the other; one either influences his society or is influenced by it.

The 120-Year Failure

Several generations later we encounter another righteous man in a corrupt generation: Noah, builder of the ark and regenerator of humanity after the Flood.

In Noah, we find the first stirrings of a departure from self to improve and rehabilitate one’s fallen fellow. In the year 1536 from creation (2225 bce) G-d told Noah that “the end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence” and that He therefore intends to “bring a deluge of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh” and start anew with Noah and his family. Noah is instructed to build an ark so that they may survive the Flood. Our sages relate that Noah worked on the ark’s construction a full one hundred and twenty years; all this time, he called out to his generation to mend its ways and avoid catastrophe.

However, the Zohar criticizes Noah for the fact that, despite his efforts, he did not pray for the salvation of his generation, unlike Abraham and Moses who pleaded with G-d to spare the wicked. This implies that, ultimately, it did not matter to Noah what became of them. Had he truly cared, he would not have sufficed with doing his best to bring them to repent but would have implored the Almighty to repeal His decree of destruction — just as one who is personally threatened would never say, “Well, I did my best to save myself,” and leave it at that, but would beseech G-d to help him.

In other words, Noah’s involvement with others was limited to his sense of what *he* ought to do for

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them, as opposed to a true concern for their well-being. His “self” had sufficiently broadened to include the imperative to act for the sake of another, recognizing that the lack of a “social conscience” is a defect in one’s own character; but he fell short of transcending the self to care for others beyond the consideration of his own righteousness.

This also explains a curious aspect of Noah’s efforts to reach out to his generation. When the Flood came, Noah and his family entered the ark — alone. His 120-year campaign yielded not a single *baal teshuvah* (repentant)! Perhaps public relations was never Noah’s strong point, but how are we to explain the fact that, in all this time, he failed to win over a single individual?

But in order to influence others, one’s motives must be pure; in the words of our sages, “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.” Deep down, a person will always sense whether you truly have his interests at heart, or you’re filling a need of your own by seeking to change him. If your work to enlighten your fellow stems from a desire to “do the right thing” — to observe the mitzvot to “love your fellow as yourself” and “rebuke your fellow” — but without really caring about the result, your call will be met with scant response. The echo of personal motive, be it the most laudable of personal motives, will be sensed, if only subconsciously, by the object of your efforts, and will ultimately put him off.

The Departure From Self

Ten generations later was born an individual who raised the concept of man’s devotion to the welfare of his neighbor to new selfless heights. This man was Abraham, the first Jew.

Abraham, too, faced a corrupt and pagan world; indeed, his title, “the Hebrew,” is associated with the fact that “the entire world stood on one side, and he stood on the other.” After coming to recognize the Creator, he devoted his life to bringing the belief and ethos of a One G-d to his generation. Wherever he went, he “caused G-d’s name to be known in the world.” Abraham also concerned himself with the more mundane needs of his fellows, offering his tent as an open house of refreshment and lodging for all desert wayfarers, regardless of spiritual station.

The selflessness of Abraham’s concern for his fellow is demonstrated by his daring intervention on behalf of the five sinful cities of the Sodom Valley. G-

d had decided to destroy these cities for their wicked ways. Abraham petitioned G-d on their behalf, using the strongest terms to demand of G-d that he spare these cities for the sake of the few righteous individuals they might contain. “It behooves You not to do such a thing,” he challenged G-d, “to slay the righteous with the wicked... Shall the judge of the universe not act justly?!” Abraham put his own spiritual integrity at risk for the sake of the most corrupt of sinners; he was prepared to incur G-ds wrath upon himself, giving precedence to their physical lives over his own relationship with the Almighty.

And because people sensed that he had their own good, and only their own good, at heart, they responded. When Abraham and Sarah left Charan for the Holy Land, they were joined by the “souls which they had made in Charan” — the community of men and women who had rallied to their cause. Sixty-five years later he was able to say to his servant Eliezer: “When G-d summoned me from the house of my father, he was G-d of the heavens but not of the earth: the inhabitants of the earth did not recognize Him and His name was not referred to in the land. But now that I have made His name familiar in the mouths of His creatures, He is G-d in both heaven and earth.”

No Strings Attached

But even Abraham’s love is still not the ultimate. It took another four centuries for the epitome of selfless devotion to one’s fellow to emerge in the person of Moses.

Abraham’s virtue over Noah was that his objective in relating to others lay not in realizing the potential of his social self (as was the case with Noah) but in achieving the desired result: to transform their behavior and character, bringing to light their good and perfect essence. But therein also lies the limitations of Abraham’s love: ultimately, Abraham’s kindness had an ulterior motive. True, it was not a personal motive; true, it was a motive that spells the recipient’s ultimate good and is consistent with the recipient’s true self; but it was an ulterior motive nonetheless.

Our sages describe how Abraham’s hospitality was but a means to achieve his goal of converting his guests to a belief in G-d. The same is true of Abraham’s valiant prayer on behalf of the Sodomites. He beseeched G-d to spare them because of the righteous in their midst — as long as righteous individuals remain in a city, there is hope for the wicked as well. On a deeper level, he was referring to the “righteous one” within the wicked person, his inner potential for

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good; spare them, Abraham was saying, perhaps the good in them will triumph yet. As soon as he became aware that the wicked of Sodom were beyond hope, he ceased his prayers.

Such love and concern — for the sake of the potential good that one sees in another — is a love that is tainted, however minutely, with selfishness: one is relating to one's fellow not as one's fellow sees himself, but with an eye to one's own vision of him. This allows for a reaction on his part (expressed, unexpressed or even unconscious) that "You don't care for me as I am, only for what you wish to make of me. So you don't really care about me at all." True, one's only desire is to reveal the other's essential self; but this is a deeper, still unrealized, self. One's love fails to address the other as he now expressly is, focusing instead on one's knowledge of what he latently is and what he can and ought to make of himself. In contrast, Moses' love for his people was utterly selfless. His was an unconditional love, one that is unassuming of what they ought to be or what they are on a deeper, yet unrealized level. He loved them as they were, and did everything in his power to satisfy their needs, both material and spiritual.

When Moses pleaded with G-d on behalf of the worshippers of the Golden Calf, he did not say "forgive them because they will repent" or "forgive them for they carry great potential," only "forgive them. And if You wont, erase me from Your Torah." Either You accept the sinner as he is, or put together a nation and Torah without me.

The difference between Moses and his predecessors is also reflected in the extent of their influence on their fellows. Enoch, with his wholly self-directed righteousness, had no influence, and was himself susceptible to influence. Noah — who extended himself to his fellows, but only because he recognized that concern for ones fellow is an integral part of a perfect self — was not influenceable, but did not influence. Abraham's teaching and instruction, free of such personal bias, was embraced by multitudes of followers; but since even Abraham's efforts fell short of the pure definition of selflessness, his influence was correspondingly limited. Today, we have no traceable

heirs to Abrahams disciples (what, indeed, ever became of the "souls they had made in Charan"?). But the effects of Moses' utterly selfless love are eternal: his guidance and leadership of his people yielded a nation whose endurance and unbroken continuity, to this very day, defies all laws of history.

"Outreach" Redefined

In order to truly influence a fellow, we must devote ourselves to him or her without regard to whether s/he will be influenced or not. He is a fellow human being who needs your help. So help him. If she lacks something material, help her. If she is spiritually lost, help her. Many see the point of influencing a fellow Jew to do a good deed, a mitzvah --to put on tefillin, to perform a single act of charity, to avoid a moral transgression -- if this leads to a greater involvement, and ultimately, a complete transformation. But when confronted with a "lost case" they feel its a waste of time. Why bother?

Why bother? Because you care about him, not only about what he ought to be, what he will be, or what you see in him. He lacks something now, and you are privileged to be of assistance. If you care for him because you expect to influence him, then chances are he won't respond. But if you care for him whether he responds or not, then he will respond.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe;
adapted by Yanki Tauber*