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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Holy Normalcy

“Be holy...” (19:1)

It always struck me whenever I had the privilege to meet a great Torah Sage how normal he seemed. He was not hidden in a cave at the side of a mountain, picking berries for sustenance and living a total disconnected and ascetic life. It was, in fact, as if he defined the yardstick of normalcy. After meeting this person, other people seemed somewhat less than normal.

The Alshich explains that G-d instructed Moshe to call all the people together when giving them the commandment to be holy in order that it would be clear that holiness is not something achievable by only the few. Every Jew has the potential to be holy, and thus it follows that if every Jew has the potential to be holy, holiness is not a voluntary affair but an obligation.

Holiness does not consist of the mortifying the flesh or of extreme abstinence. Holiness does not mean rolling in ice or lying on a bed of nails. Holiness means becoming more and more normal.

Holy Jews live normal married lives. They eat normally. They breathe normally. However, everything they do is with consideration and within measure.

Holiness means being normal even in the most abnormal situations. It means never compromising with our lower desires, but at the same time recognizing that we are part physical beings. Being holy means resisting that extra spoonful of *cholent*, even if the *kashrut* is top-notch. Above all, holiness means going beyond the technical fulfillment of the mitzvahs. It means “sanctifying the permitted.” When something is outright forbidden, it is much easier to steer clear of it. In such a case, there is no room for negotiation with our lower personas. However, when something is permitted, there is always the temptation to push the edge of the envelope. And although technically one could stay within the letter of the law, the commandment to be holy tells us that there is more to mitzvah observance than the letter of the law. Observing the *spirit* of the law is a mitzvah in itself. That is what it means to be normal.

• Source: Based on the Ramban

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yoma 16-22

Personal Space

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, "When they stood, they were extremely crowded, but when they bowed down they had a lot of room."

This was one of the ten miracles that Hashem did in the era of the First Beit Hamikdash – some of which were in the Beit Hamikdash and some of which were in Jerusalem. The *mishna* in Pirkei Avot (5:5) lists all ten miracles. The one referenced on our *daf* is the miracle that “They stood crowded but had ample space in which to prostrate themselves.” Other examples of these miracles are that meat that was *kodesh* never spoiled and that never did a snake or scorpion cause injury in Jerusalem.

It is axiomatic that Rav would not state a teaching that is already found in a *mishna* as being *his own* Torah statement. So, how does what he teaches differ or elucidate what is apparently the same miracle as taught in the words of the *mishna*? Rashi explains that this miracle, according to Rav’s statement, means that when it was extremely crowded in the Beit Hamikdash, there was nevertheless a miraculous expansion of one’s personal space for prostration in order to say *Vidui* – a verbal confession to Hashem of one’s sins. The person would miraculously have full use of a surrounding *daled amot* (four cubits) in which to prostrate and verbally confess, without a concern that the person nearest him would be within earshot and be able to hear this private admission – a factor which could potentially inhibit a person’s confession due to embarrassment of others hearing his verbalizing his transgressions.

The commentaries find Rashi’s explanation intriguing and even problematic. Since Rav’s statement begins, “At the time when the Jewish People went up (to Jerusalem and the Beit Hamikdash) for the *Regel* (i.e. the Festivals),” it would appear that this would include all of the Festivals – such as Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. However, the only special occasion when there is a mitzvah of *Vidui* is on Yom Kippur. It is a mitzvah of the day to say *Vidui* on Yom Kippur, which is today an integral part of our prayer services – in fact numerous times during the day. And at least at one time in our prayers, there is a widespread custom to do a type of prostration in the Synagogue, in a way that is *similar* to what was done in the Beit Hamikdash. And not only is it not the mitzvah of the other *Yamim Tovim* to say *Vidui*; there is even a halachic reason to not say prayers that implore Hashem for forgiveness and for repentance, since these days are days for rejoicing, and dwelling on one’s transgressions may likely sadden the person.

In light of this question, some commentaries in fact say that, according to Rashi, Rav is teaching that the miracle of “crowded while standing but with plenty of spacing when bowing” occurred only on Yom Kippur. And it occurred for the reason given by Rashi: When the multitude of people who gathered in the Beit Hamikdash on Yom Kippur prostrated themselves to say *Vidui* to confess their sins before Hashem and ask for atonement, they would have sufficient space (social distancing?) to be able to confess privately and without fear that others nearby would hear. (It is almost certainly a “coincidence” that the *daled amot* each person had as his personal space is the equivalent of about the two-meter-rule we have heard so much about in the past year during the pandemic.)

Another answer is that Rashi is not restricting the understanding of Rav's statement to Yom Kippur, but rather that this miracle occurred on every Festival on which the entire Jewish People would congregate in the Beit Hamikdash. Despite the general disinclination to confess and ask Hashem for forgiveness on Shabbat and Yom Tov, doing so in the Beit Hamikdash in the place of the Divine Presence is different. The enormity of the spiritual significance of being in this uniquely special place dictated that it was not only acceptable but even correct to do so. What is not okay in a normal synagogue during the year – just as we do not normally say “*Slach lanu.. m'chal lanu*” on Shabbat and Yom Tov – is understandably desirable and correct on Yom Tov in the Beit HaMikdash.

A third answer is unlike the explanation of Rashi, and is not related to the mitzvah of *Vidui*. Some explain that the bowing Rav mentions is referring to the bowing that each person would do upon entering the courtyard of the Beit Hamikdash.

Another answer I have heard as a possibility is that the prostration was *after* entering the courtyard, and it was a spontaneous act of a complete nullification of one's ego in the presence of the *Shechina* in the Beit Hamikdash. According to this answer, the prostration was a sign of great humility, but not related to saying *Vidui* – something not appropriate for Yom Tov. A display of humility before one's Maker and Sustainer is one of great happiness befitting the *simcha* of Yom Tov.

On a personal note, I found it very easy to relate to the way Rashi explains the first part of Rav's statement that “They would stand crowded” – although under very different circumstances. The word for “crowded” in the text is *tzafufim*, which Rashi says is based on the Hebrew root-word *tzaf*, which means “to float.” He explains that the multitude of people in the Beit Hamikdash were so crowded that the mere pressure caused them to be lifted from the ground and “floating” in the air, without their feet on the ground. I imagine that the people in the Beit Hamikdash at the time would take this crowded-floating in stride, so to speak, and carry on with their reason for being in that holy place.

Yet I once experienced extreme crowding-floating – along with others present – during a *levaya* (funeral service and procession) for one of the greatest rabbis of our generation on one of the main streets in Jerusalem in the middle of the day. What started off as a hundreds, grew to thousands, tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands – as befitting the honor due to the Torah greatness of this very great Torah scholar leader. Somehow, I found myself in the middle of it all, and, as the crowd grew, I found myself lifted from the ground, and, in a wavelike manner, landed after a short time more than 10 feet away from my original place. More than once, I was concerned that I and others would be crushed and harmed to a lesser or greater degree. Thank G-d, I eventually found an “escape route” – along with many others. When I later relayed this experience to a great rabbi in Jerusalem, he told me to be careful in the future and to leave such an event at the first signs of overcrowding. The streets of the holy city of Jerusalem, as holy as they are, are still not necessarily the place to expect the miracle that Hashem did for the Jewish People in the Beit Hamikdash.

- Yoma 21a

**Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet on
The Morning Blessings
by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
www.ohr.edu/morning-blessings**

Q & A

ACHAREI MOT

Questions

1. Why does the Torah emphasize that *Parshas Acharei Mos* was taught after the death of Aaron's sons?
2. What is the punishment for a *Kohen Gadol* who inappropriately enters the *Kodesh Kodashim*?
3. How long did the first *Beis Hamikdash* exist?
4. What did the *Kohen Gadol* wear when he entered the *Kodesh Kodashim*?
5. How many times did the *Kohen Gadol* change his clothing and immerse in the *mikveh* on Yom Kippur?
6. How many times did he wash his hands and feet from the *Kiyor* (copper laver)?
7. The *Kohen Gadol* offered a bull *Chatat* to atone for himself and his household. Who paid for it?
8. One of the goats that was chosen by lot went to *Azazel*. What is *Azazel*?
9. Who is included in the "household" of the *Kohen Gadol*?
10. For what sin does the goat *Chatat* atone?
11. After the Yom Kippur service, what is done with the four linen garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol*?
12. Where were the fats of the *Chatat* burned?
13. Who is solely responsible for attaining atonement for the Jewish People on Yom Kippur?
14. From one point in history, installation of the *Kohen Gadol* through anointing was no longer used but was conducted by donning the special garments of that office. From when and why?
15. What is the penalty of *karet*?
16. Which categories of animals must have their blood covered when they are slaughtered?
17. When a person eats a kosher bird that was improperly slaughtered (a *neveilah*), at what point does he contract *tumah*?
18. The Torah commands the Jewish People not to follow the "*chukim*" of the Canaanites. What are the forbidden "*chukim*"?
19. What is the difference between "*mishpat*" and "*chok*"?
20. May a man marry his wife's sister?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 16:1 - To strengthen the warning not to enter the *Kodesh Kodashim* except on Yom Kippur.
2. 16:2 - Death.
3. 16:3 - 410 years.
4. 16:4 - Only the four linen garments worn by an ordinary *Kohen*.
5. 16:4 - Five times.
6. 16:4 - Ten times.
7. 16:6 - The *Kohen Gadol*.
8. 16:8 - A jagged cliff.
9. 16:11 - All the *Kohanim*.
10. 16:16 - For unknowingly entering the *Beit Hamikdash* in the state of *tumah*.
11. 16:23 - They must be put into *geniza* and not be used again.
12. 16:25 - On the outer *Mizbe'ach*.
13. 16:32 - The *Kohen Gadol*.
14. 16:32 - Anointing ceased during the kingship of *Yoshiahu*. At that time, the oil of anointing was hidden away.
15. 17:9 - One's offspring die and one's own life is shortened.
16. 17:13 - Non domesticated kosher animals and all species of kosher birds.
17. 17:15 - When the food enters the esophagus.
18. 18:3 - Their social customs.
19. 18:4 - A "*mishpat*" conforms to the human sense of justice. A "*chok*" is a law whose reason is not given to us and can only be understood as a decree from Hashem.
20. 18:18 - Yes, but not during the lifetime of his wife.

Q & A

KEDOSHIM

Questions

1. Why was *Parshat Kedoshim* said in front of all the Jewish People?
2. Why does the Torah mention the duty to honor one's father before it mentions the duty to honor one's mother?
3. Why is the command to fear one's parents followed by the command to keep Shabbat?
4. Why does Shabbat observance supersede honoring parents?
5. What is "*leket*"?
6. In *Shemot* 20:13, the Torah commands "Do not steal." What does the Torah add when it commands in *Vayikra* 19:11 "Do not steal"?
7. "Do not do wrong to your neighbor" (19:13). To what "wrong" is the Torah referring?
8. By when must you pay someone who worked for you during the day?
9. How does Rashi explain the prohibition "Don't put a stumbling block before a sightless person"?
10. In a monetary case involving a poor person and a rich person, a judge is likely to wrongly favor the poor person. What rationale does Rashi give for this?
11. When rebuking someone, what sin must one be careful to avoid?
12. It's forbidden to bear a grudge. What example does Rashi give of this?
13. The Torah forbids tattooing. How is a tattoo made?
14. How does one fulfill the mitzvah of "*hadarta p'nei zaken*"?
15. What punishment will never come to the entire Jewish People?
16. What penalty does the Torah state for cursing one's parents?
17. When the Torah states a death penalty but doesn't define it precisely, to which penalty is it referring?
18. What will result if the Jewish People ignore the laws of forbidden relationships?
19. Which of the forbidden relationships listed in this week's Parsha were practiced by the Canaanites?
20. Is it proper for a Jew to say "I would enjoy eating ham"?

Answers

1. 19:2 - Because the fundamental teachings of the Torah are contained in this Parsha.
2. 19:3 - Since it is more natural to honor one's mother, the Torah stresses the obligation to honor one's father.
3. 19:3 - To teach that one must not violate Torah law even at the command of one's parents.
4. 19:3 - Because the parents are also commanded by Hashem to observe Shabbat. Parents deserve great honor, but not at the "expense" of Hashem's honor.
5. 19:9 - "*Leket*" is one or two stalks of grain accidentally dropped while harvesting. They are left for the poor.
6. 19:11 - The Torah in *Vayikra* prohibits monetary theft. In *Shemot* it prohibits kidnapping.
7. 19:13 - Withholding wages from a worker.
8. 19:13 - Before the following dawn.
9. 19:13 - Don't give improper advice to a person who is unaware in a matter. For example, don't advise someone to sell his field, when in reality you yourself wish to buy it.
10. 19:15 - The judge might think: "This rich person is obligated to give charity to this poor person regardless of the outcome of this court case. Therefore, I'll rule in favor of the poor person. That way, he'll receive the financial support he needs without feeling shame."
11. 19:17 - Causing public embarrassment.
12. 19:18 - Person A asks person B: "Can I borrow your shovel?" Person B says: "No." The next day, B says to A: "Can I borrow your scythe?" A replies: "Sure, I'm not stingy like you are."
13. 19:28 - Ink is injected into the skin with a needle.
14. 19:32 - By not sitting in the seat of elderly people, and by not contradicting their statements.
15. 20:3 - "*Karet*" - being spiritually "cut off."
16. 20:9 - Death by stoning.
17. 20:10 - *Chenek* (strangulation).
18. 20:22 - The land of Israel will "spit them out."
19. 20:23 - All of them.
20. 20:26 - Yes.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Say Uncle

The English word *uncle* refers to one's parents' brother and also to the husband of one's parents' sister. This means that *uncle* can denote up to four types of relationships: one's father's brother, one's mother's brother, one's father's sister's husband, and one's mother's sister's husband. In contrast to this, the Biblical Hebrew word *dod* ("uncle") primarily refers to only one of those types of relationships: one's father's brother. Another Hebrew kinship term – *misaref* – seems to mean one's mother's brother, and this essay will show how even though *dod* and *misaref* might both be translated as "uncle," they are not synonyms.

The Torah (Lev. 18:14, 20:20) prohibits a man from marrying his *dodah* ("aunt") because doing so "exposes the nakedness" of his *dod* ("uncle"). It is clear from the Torah's wording that this Biblical prohibition specifically applies to one's father's brother's wife (see *Torat Kohanim* there). However, one is still forbidden from marrying his *mother's* brother's wife according to Rabbinic fiat (see *Yevamot* 21a).

A person's father's sister or mother's sister is typically referred to respectively as one's "father's sister" or "mother's sister" (Lev. 18:12-13, 20:19) – not *dodah*. Yet, there is one exception. When Moses' father Amram, son of Kehat, son of Levi, married Yocheved, daughter of Levi, the Torah describes Yocheved as Amram's *dodah* (Ex. 6:20) because she was his father's sister. However, this exception is found only with the word *dodah* but not with the word *dod*.

Indeed, Rashi (to Yirmiyahu 32:12) authoritatively asserts that we never find in Scripture that the term *dod* refers to one's *mother's* brother. It always means one's *father's* brother. In fact, when

rendering *dod* in Aramaic, Targum Onkelos (Lev. 18:14, 20:20) translates *dod* as *achwuhi*, which Rabbi Rafael Binyamin Posen (1942-2016) explains is a portmanteau of the words *ach* ("brother") and *avohi* ("his father").

Nonetheless, the semantic range of *dod* later expanded to include "lover" or "companion," as the word seems to mean throughout Song of Songs. This can be chalked up to the regularity of avunculate marriages, whereby a woman would marry her uncle, and does not represent an actual change in the core meaning of the term *dod* (however, see Rabbi Zev Hoberman's *Zeev Yitraf, Pesach* ch. 90).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Brelsau (1740-1814) traces the word *dod/dodah* to the monoliteral root represented by the letter DALET, which means "separation" / "protrusion." He explains that just as a *dad* ("breast") protrudes from one's body and is separated from the rest of one's person, so does a *dod/dodah* protrude from the linear stem of one's family tree as a separate branch.

Interestingly, the Targumic term *achvuh* was later abbreviated into *chaviv/chabib* in Talmudic Aramaic. With this in mind, Rashi (to *Maccot* 3b) explains that the Amoraic Sage Rav would refer to Rav Chiya as "*chabibi*" ("my uncle") because Rav Chiya's brother was Rav's father. Elsewhere, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 5a, *Pesachim* 4a) relates that Rav Chiya's *sister* was Rav's mother, and yet Rashi focuses on the fact that Rav Chiya's *brother* was Rav's father because the term *chaviv*, which is the Aramaic equivalent to the Hebrew *dod*, refers specifically to one's *father's* brother and not to one's *mother's* brother (which should be *misaref*, see below). This point is made by Rabbi David Cohen

of Gvul Yaavetz in Brooklyn and Rabbi Yochanan Sofer (1923-2016), the late Erloi Rebbe. (If you are wondering how both of Rav's parents could be Rav Chiya's siblings, as Rashi to *Eruvin* 12b and *Chullin* 32a, and also Rashbam to *Bava Batra* 41b note, the answer must be that one sibling was related to Rav Chiya maternally and the other paternally. Thus, both siblings were related to Rav Chiya but not to each other. So, they were allowed to marry and Rav was born of that union.)

Similarly, Rabbi Moshe Kunitz (1774-1837) argues that Esther was Mordechai's cousin through his father's side because the Torah describes her as "Esther, daughter of Avichayil, uncle (*dod*) of Mordechai" (Esther 2:15), using the word *dod* instead of *misaref*. Rabbi Kunitz offers proof to his position from the Talmud (*Yevamot* 54b), which explains that the prohibition of marrying one's *doodah* ("aunt") applies only to one's aunt "from the father's side," meaning one's father's paternal brother's wife. Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (1835-1909) agrees that this passage proves that *dod* refers only to a paternal uncle, but notes that it does not prove that *misaref* refers to one's maternal uncle. (Parenthetically, we should note that although by Biblical law a man is allowed to marry his father's *maternal* brother's ex-wife or widow, the Rabbis nonetheless decreed that one is forbidden from doing so, as in *Yevamot* 21a).

We have already mentioned the word *misarfo* several times in this essay, but where does this word come from and how does it fit into our discussion? The prophet Amos foretells of utter destruction that was destined to befall the Kingdom of Israel, whose population would be diminished through plague and enemy onslaught, and even the survivors would subsequently be killed when the enemies captured their cities and burned their houses down. In that context, Amos says the following: "And his uncle (*dod*) and *misarfo* will carry him and take out the bones from the house..." (Amos 6:10).

What does *misarfo* in this verse mean? This word appears only once in the entire Bible – making it a *hapax legomenon* – which certainly complicates any efforts to hone in on its precise meaning.

Ibn Ezra (to Amos 6:10) cites the early grammarian Rabbi Yehuda Ibn Kuraish (9th century North

Africa) as explaining that while *dod* refers to one's *paternal* uncle (i.e. his *father's* brother), *misaref* refers to one's *maternal* uncle (i.e. his *mother's* brother). The same understanding is found in Ibn Janach's *Sefer HaShorashim* (entry SIN-REISH-PEH), as well as in the Radak's *Sefer HaShorashim*. It was also popularized in Karaite scholarship by the early Karaite commentator Yefet ben Ali (10th century Iraq). According to this approach, both *dod* and *misaref* mean "uncle," but the two words refer to two different types of uncles.

One problem with this approach is that the relationship of maternal uncle comes up several other times in the Bible (Gen. 29:10, Judges 9:1, 9:3) and is always denoted by the phrase that literally reads "mother's brother/brothers" and never by the term *misaref*. This would suggest that *misaref* does not mean "mother's brother." Moreover, Professor Gary Rendsburg wrote to me that Ibn Kuraish and Ibn Janach's interpretation may have been influenced by their native Arabic, which has two words for "uncle" – *em* ("paternal uncle") and *khal* ("maternal uncle") – and there is no reason to assume that the same should not be true in Hebrew.

That said, the various commentators offer other explanations of the word *misarfo* that are not necessarily related to "uncles." For example, Rashi (there) seems to explain *misaref* as a generic term that means "relative" or "cohort," but does not denote a specific kinship relationship. This is also the approach taken by the Septuagint and the Peshitta in translating said verse in Amos. Rabbi Yosef Ibn Kaspi (1279-1345) also seems to follow this approach, lamenting the fact that our understanding of the Hebrew language is incomplete, such that we do not know the exact familial relationship denoted by the word *misaref*.

Targum Yonatan and Radak (to Amos 6:1) explain that *misarfo* is actually a verb that refers to "burning." They understand that although this word is spelled with a SAMECH, since SAMECH and SIN are often interchangeable, its root is the trilateral SIN-REISH-PEH, which means to "burn" or "incinerate." Nonetheless, if this is indeed the meaning of *misarfo*, then this word would represent a unique inflection/conjugation of that Hebrew

root that appears nowhere else in the Bible (see also *HaKtav VeHaKabbalah* to Lev. 21:11).

Rabbi Shimon Yehuda Leib Goldblit (an early 20th century exegete) offers a synthesis of these two explanations by arguing that one's love for one's maternal uncle especially "burns" strong (see Song of Songs 8:6-7 for imagery of love depicted as a raging fire). He also explains that this is alluded to in what the Rabbis say that "most children resemble the mother's brothers" (*Bava Batra* 110a).

Professor Rendsburg follows Yechezkel Kutscher (1909-1971) in explaining *misarfo* as a verb to mean "to smear with resin." He explains *misaref* as related to the Aramaic/Hebrew word *seraf* ("sap" or "syrup"). Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) similarly proposes that *misaref* is derived from *seraf* ("tree sap") – a word that appears in the Mishna (*Orlah* 1:7, and see also *Shabbat* 26a) - although that word is spelled with a SIN. Rabbi Wertheimer explains that one's descendants are called one's "sap" because in the same way that the sap comes from within the tree itself, one's descendants come from one's own flesh. Rabbi Wertheimer further clarifies that

misaref refers specifically to "unwanted children" (i.e. wicked or wayward offspring) who "drip down" from their parents almost involuntarily, just like the sap flows from the tree casually, whether the tree wants it or not. He also notes that this lines up with the word *sar'af* (Yechezkel 31), "branch," whose root is the same as *misaref*, albeit with an extra AYIN added as the penultimate letter.

As an aside, some have argued that the English word *syrup* is related to the Hebrew/Aramaic word *seraf*. However, etymologists cited by the Oxford English Dictionary offer a different explanation. They explain that the English words *syrup*, *sorbet*, and *sherbet/sherbert* all ultimately derive from the Arabic word *sharba/sharab*, which means "drink." Interestingly, in Hebrew, the root SHIN-REISH-BET means "thirstiness" or "dryness" (or "heat wave," in Modern Hebrew) making it an auto-antonym of its Arabic cognate. *Shoresh Yesha* actually invokes the interchangeability of PEH and BET to connect *saraf* with *sharav*, explaining that "dryness" comes from heat, just like "burning" does (see also Malbim to Yeshayahu 35:7).

Le'Zechut Refuah Shleimah for my dear uncle, Yosef Eliezer ben Shprintza
לזכות רפואה שלמה לדודי וידידי יוסף אליעזר בן שפרינצא בתוך שאר חולי ישראל

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for ruling.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 4)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

“These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one’s parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all.” (Tractate Shabbat 127a)

Next on the list is arriving early to the study hall in the morning and in the evening. According to many of the commentaries, this is not referring to coming to the synagogue for prayers. Rather, it refers to the early arrival to learn Torah in the study hall. Many years ago I heard an explanation as to why it is not referring to prayer. Our Sages are working under the assumption that a person had already woken up early and had finished their prayers. Accordingly, the only other reason for being in the study hall would be to learn Torah. This concept is so important that the Talmud (Tractate Berachot 64a) teaches that one who does so merits to have the Divine Presence be present as he learns G-d’s precious words.

According to the Chazon Ish, the true sweetness of Torah is something extraordinary that can be experienced only after ten hours of continuous study. Without that, it is impossible to even begin to describe what true spirituality really is. Continual interruptions while learning are the equivalent of placing a pot full of food on the fire and continuously removing it from the fire before it has time to cook. As the Chazon Ish describes it, after learning for six hours a person forgets about the physicality of this world. Then, after seven hours of learning, one feels a closeness to G-d that has not been felt until now. A closeness that causes the person to fill up with a true sense of inner joy. After eight hours, a person is so immersed in spirituality that their physical desires are negated and their whole being is now dedicated to G-d. After nine hours, they are ablaze with an inner sanctity. And,

finally after ten hours of learning Torah without a break, it is impossible to even begin to describe in words the divine state the person is in – both physically and emotionally.

However, as was mentioned in the introduction to this section, all the mitzvahs mentioned here are actually focused on our interpersonal relations – even the mitzvahs that seem to be concentrating solely on G-d. How is that so? When a person sits in the study hall and learns Torah with verve and passion, they are actually serving as an example to others. Studying Torah in a way which elevates both the soul and the body is difficult to achieve. But when there are others doing just that, they become the role models for everyone else around them.

There is no greater kindness than to show someone else the sweetness of learning Torah and to motivate others to want to emulate you.

Rabbi Shmuel Birenbaum (1920-2008), the revered head of the Mir Yeshivah in New York, woke up in the hospital after suffering a massive heart attack. His son, Rabbi Asher, was sitting next to his bed. Almost the first thing that Rabbi Birenbaum did was to ask him to bring him a volume of the Talmud. His son explained to him that the doctors had left them with strict orders that the Rabbi should not learn because it would put too much strain on his already weakened heart. But Rabbi Birenbaum was insistent and his son went to look for one volume and came back with Tractate Gittin, which he started to read to Rabbi Birenbaum. After a few minutes, Rabbi

Birenbaum signaled that he was too weak to continue, but he asked his son to place the Talmud on his heart. Rabbi Asher gently placed the volume on Rabbi Birenbaum's chest. Rabbi Birenbaum then asked his son to place his (Rabbi Birenbaum's) hand on the Talmud. As he lay there holding onto Tractate Gittin – so weak that he could hardly speak

– he feebly whispered to his son, “Now sing with me.” And he started to sing the words that are found in the blessing prior to the *Shema* in the nighttime service, “*Ki hem chayeinu* – “For they (the Torah and the commandments) are our life.”

To be continued...

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Acharei Mot

G-d instructs the *kohanim* to exercise extreme care when they enter the Mishkan. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol is to approach the holiest part of the Mishkan after special preparations and wearing special clothing. He brings offerings unique to Yom Kippur, including two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is "for G-d" and is offered in the Temple, while the other is "for Azazel" in the desert. The Torah states the individual's obligations on Yom Kippur: On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must “afflict” oneself. We are to abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing and marital relations.

Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a woman's monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited.

Kedoshim

The nation is enjoined to be holy. Many prohibitions and positive commandments are taught:

Prohibitions: Idolatry; eating offerings after their time-limit; theft and robbery; denial of theft; false oaths; retention of someone's property; delaying payment to an employee; hating or cursing a fellow Jew (especially one's parents); gossip; placing physical and spiritual stumbling blocks; perversion of justice; inaction when others are in danger; embarrassing; revenge; bearing a grudge; cross-breeding; wearing a garment of wool and linen; harvesting a tree during its first three years; gluttony and intoxication; witchcraft; shaving the beard and sideburns; tattooing.

Positive: Awe for parents and respect for the elderly; leaving part of the harvest for the poor; loving others (especially a convert); eating in Jerusalem the fruits from a tree's fourth year; awe for the Temple; respect for Torah scholars, the blind and the deaf.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Enlightened Practice

Practice My social ordinances (mishpatim) and keep My statutes (chukim), in order to walk in them; I, G-d, am your G-d: Keep My statutes and My social ordinances, which a man shall do and live thereby; I am G-d.

The Sages teach that *mishpatim* (social ordinances) are matters that are written in the Torah, but would have deserved to be written even had they not been written. Meaning, they are eminently sensible to us in structuring a functional society. They include, for example, property law and tort law. *Chukim* (statutes) are matters against which our sensual nature and the non-Jewish world object.

Both *chukim* and *mishpatim* are expressions of Divine wisdom and justice. But since the matters and relationships governed by the *mishpatim* are in the realm of social relationships of people and things, they are readily grasped by the human mind – insofar as their nature, justification and purpose in society are concerned. The matters and relationships governed by *chukim* are different. These relate to the interplay between body and soul, and the impact of various actions on the spiritual and moral calling of man. These are not clear to man, and are apparent only to G-d – Who created man and created the statutes. Thus, the *chukim* can appear to be without meaning or purpose in the superficial judgment of Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers.

Notice how the verses cited above first instruct to *practice* the *mishpatim* and *keep* the *chukim*, statutes. In the very next verse, *mishpatim* and the *chukim* are combined, and we are instructed to “keep” and “practice” both. “Keeping” classically refers to study of the commandments – this is the very first condition to fulfilling the Torah.

At first glance, one would think the study of the *mishpatim* is less essential, because their purpose and rationale is self-evident. On the other hand, the *fulfillment* of these social ordinances is clearly important because the social harm created by their disregard is obvious. Hence, we are first told to “practice” the *mishpatim*.

With *chukim*, it is exactly the opposite. At first glance, it is evident that their study is indispensable because their origin is in Divine Revelation alone, and the human mind would not otherwise discover them. On the other hand, there will be those who will content themselves with the study of *chukim*, and not be careful in fulfilling them, because the advantage in their fulfillment and the harm in their neglect are not at all obvious. Thus, we are first told to “study” the *chukim*.

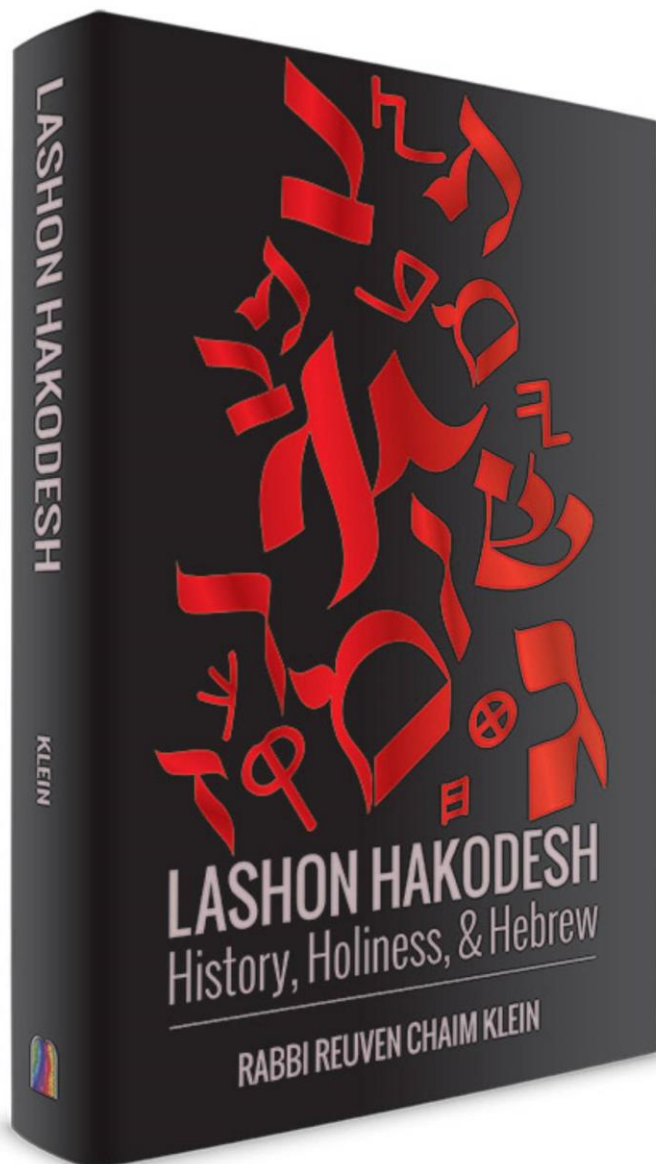
The Torah then emphasizes the need for both the study and the careful fulfillment for both *mishpatim* and *chukim*. The general consciousness of justice is not sufficient to intuit justice as G-d sees it – “My social ordinances.” Those require study of the revealed Word no less than the *chukim*, for G-d’s laws of justice are not merely utilitarian assignment of rights and responsibilities. They are the absolute truth of matters and relationships. On the other hand, penetrating study of the *chukim* is insufficient – a true understanding of what is good for the soul can be reached only by those who practice them.

- Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 18:45

Lashon HaKodesh

History, Holiness, & Hebrew

By Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein



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