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Parshat Kedoshim

Nissan 26 , 5774

Kedoshim: Love

Rabbi Neil Fleischmann

Perhaps of all of the sayings in Kedoshim, none is as well known as "Veahavta lereakha kamokha." The Ramban points out a contradiction: How can it be that you should love your friend equally to yourself? There is a rule in the Gemara that "Chayekha kodmin," your life comes first. The concept of one's own life taking precedence is illustrated with the scenario of one of two parties in the desert finding a canteen with enough water in it to keep one person alive. The one who has it uses it, and is not supposed to give it to his friend (Bava Metzia 62a). How then can it be, the Ramban asks, that we're instructed here to love a friend equally to our love for our self, when we know that the Torah supports a person's survival instinct and says that your own life comes first?

What is the real meaning of ve'ahavta le'reacha kamocho?"KaMocha" need not be defined as "in equal measure," but can mean "in a similar way." The Ramban takes this phrase as an overstatement for emphasis. He explains that what we're commanded here is to love our friends also, as we love ourselves. That desire that we have regarding ourselves, to live and be well, should carry over to others.

This idea is supported by the Rambam (Mada 6: 3) who writes that we should speak in praise of our neighbors, be careful with the honor and the property of others, as we are with our own. While it is true that our lives come first, that need not cause us to wish badly for anyone else. On the contrary, what is expected of us by God, as conveyed in this command, is to wish only good for others.

The one thing we aren't expected to do is to wish for someone else to have something instead of our having it ourselves. The Ramban notes that it doesn't say "et reakha," rather "lereakha." "LeReakha means towards your friend, but not exactly the same. We know that we are not expected to love our neighbor as much as we love our own self. However, we are expected to love our fellow in all areas, as we want all goodness for ourselves. Sometimes we want good for our friend in certain areas, but not in others. Ideally, we are told in this pasuk, we should root for our friend in all matters: wealth, honor, wisdom, etc. This is very difficult; jealousy causes us to feel competitive and sometimes to not wish to see others advance. Yonatan, who we are told loved Dovid "as he loved his own soul," personifies this ideal.

Rabbi Akiva is the one who states in Bava Metzia that a person's own life takes precedence over the life of a friend. However, and this serves as a strong support for the Ramban, Rabbi Akiva is the one who famously declared that "Veahavta lereakha kamokha" is a "klal gadol" of the Torah. It seems that Rabbi Akiva was aware of the need for balance - looking out for yourself while not forgetting the rest of the world. We are told to love our friends as we love ourselves. That we want only the best for ourselves is the starting point for our love for others. There seems to be an implicit command here to work on self love. May we be blessed to love ourselves and for that love to overflow to others.

Another thought on Love:

We're told three things in Kedoshim, in close proximity to each other: to not hate our friend in our heart, to not speak lashon hara, gossip, to give reproach to our friend. It is normal to be bothered by other people sometimes. We then have an urge to talk about that person. Often we go to another person to talk about the first one.

The Torah is suggesting that, instead of talking about someone, we go to the person himself. This is very difficult but is possible to achieve if it is done with kindness. And this ties in with another command in this parsha, to love our friends.

Reb Duvedel of Lelover said that he learned what true love was from two drunks that he overheard talking on a park bench. One asked the other, "Do you love me?" And the second one said "yes." Then the first one asked the second one to tell him what the first one needed and he what was lacking. The second fellow said that he didn't know. To this, the first guy replied "Then you don't love me. If you loved me you'd tell me what I need."

May we be blessed to love one another and talk to each other with kindness rather than about each other in frustration.

The Value of Giving

Shira Levie (15)

In this week's Parsha, Kedoshim, the famous commandment is given to love your neighbor as thyself —"veahavta lereiakha kamokha" (Leviticus 19: 18) . With this said, one may ask- how exactly can man love his neighbor? What is the root of love?

In his Mikhtav M'Eliyahu, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler suggests that the foundation of love is the capacity to give to one's

beloved. He adds that it is not necessarily the case that one first loves and from the loving comes the giving. The reverse is equally true and even more powerful. One gives and from the giving comes loving. The more one gives, the more one loves. In fact, the word *ahavah*, love, is the two letter Aramaic word *hav*, to give—giving is the pathway to love.

This holds true to Klal Yisrael as a whole. *Ahavat Yisrael*, loving our nation, is not only the emotion of loving other Jews, but is translating that love into action, into actually giving something for Am Yisrael, offering part of oneself for the greater whole. To fully accept what Hashem is saying in this *pasuk*, we must always be willing to give for the sake of others, and then wholly love Am Yisrael.

The Highs and Lows of Mitzvot

Zack Rynhold ('14)

Parshat Kedoshim opens with the famous commandment of “*kedoshim tihyu*” – the commandment to be holy. This commandment is analyzed by many commentaries, including the Ramban. The Ramban states that “*kedoshim tihyu*” means a person should make sure that everything one does is done in moderation. He says that this is not a specific *mitzvah*, but rather, it is a warning. Even a Jew who obeys all of the *mitzvot* can get carried away with things one is permitted to do. Ramban is warning us that we should restrain ourselves from gluttony and other over-indulgencies. He is worried that one may deem it permissible to perhaps eat as much as they want because they are adhering to the laws of *Kashrut*.

In the next *pasuk*, Hashem reminds us the importance of keeping *Shabbat* and *Kibud Av Va'em*. But why are these *mitzvot* included in the same *pasuk*? If one looks at the *pasuk* in detail there is an answer to be found. The Torah uses the word “*Shabtotai*” to refer to *Shabbat* in this *pasuk*. Why is this in plural? The *Zohar* explains that this means there are two parts of *Shabbat*: a “higher” and a “lower” *Shabbat*. The lower *Shabbat* is the simple practicality of the day. Each Jew must rest and can dismiss one’s worries from the week. The higher *Shabbat* is the holiness of the day. We must remember that G-d created the world and rested on *Shabbat*, and this holiness allows a person to get closer to Hashem because His presence is more apparent on *Shabbat*. This is similar to the *mitzvah* of *Kibud Av Va'em*. There is a lower aspect to the *mitzvah* that when we respect our parents, they will take care of us and provide for all our needs. But there is a higher aspect in which we must honor our parents as we would revere Hashem.

So why do these *mitzvot* immediately follow “*kedoshim tihyu*” as opposed to other important *mitzvot*? It is this notion of a “higher”, more spiritual aspect, and a “lower”, more physical aspect to these *mitzvot* that establishes a connection to “*kedoshim tihyu*”. As Ramban explained, “*kedoshim tihyu*” is a warning not to abuse the physical luxuries of our world. It is therefore a reminder to not only focus on the “lower” or physical aspect of a *mitzvah*, but also the “higher”, spiritual part of the *mitzvah*. According to Ramban, “*Kedoshim tihyu*” is teaching us that while the physicality of the *mitzvot* is important, too much of the “lower” aspect can result in wrongdoing, so a “higher” aspect is necessary. This is why it is juxtaposed to *Shabbat* and *Kibud Av Va'em*. These verses show that the spiritual meaning of the *mitzvot* is of the utmost importance.

Is Kadosh Inherently Better?

Ben Atwood ('14)

“*Kedoshim tihiyu ki Kadosh Ani Hashem Elokekhem*,” “You shall be sanctified, because I, Hashem, Your God, am Sanctified” (Leviticus 19: 2). This opening to Parshat Kedoshim is one that is often questioned as elitist or racist, interpreting the verse to be asserting the nation of Israel’s superiority over the other nations of the world. This claim begs the question of chosen-ness, the notion that God singled out the Israelite nation was singled out among the other civilizations to be His Chosen Nation. A better understanding of Judaism’s status as the Chosen Religion will clarify those who morally oppose the idea of chosen-ness. Furthermore, the novel concept of *kedusha* distinct from superiority can clarify the Jewish role in the surrounding world, particularly poignant during the time of year of *Sefirat haOmer* and *Yom haShoah*.

To ascertain the Jewish meaning of chosen-ness, the history of the concept must be first understood. The concept of the superiority of Judaism does not actually derive from the Torah. Yes, God often refers to the Israelites as “his nation,” and terms the people “*kadosh*,” but other nations are not referenced as inferior. In fact, the first time the concept of the Jewish nation being superior to other nations is truly promoted is after the rise of Christianity and Islam, two nations claiming to be God’s One nation. As Jewish leaders were constantly called upon to defend their own faith, their required response was to claim the Jewish nation is the Chosen Nation, one nation above the others.

However, it seems that the famous Jewish Medieval thinkers did not take the comments of superiority used in anti-Christian and anti-Muslim polemics too seriously, as Maimonides and Joseph Albo refrain from including chosen-ness in their respective required doctrines of faith. Furthermore, Saadia Gaon actively repudiates the concept of a superior religion and even warns against the arrogance that can accompany such a ridiculous claim (*Emunoth v'Deoth II: 2, III: 7, VII: 3*). The outlier seems to be Judah haLevi, in his *Sefer haKuzari*, who seems to support the inherent superiority of Jewish souls, although the true meaning of haLevi’s words are often disputed and are often reinterpreted (see Dr. Micah Goodman’s commentary on the *Sefer haKuzari* as an example of such reevaluation).

One place the concept of the Jewish People being chosen from the other nations of the world seems to be established is in written prayer, where the term “chosen from the other nations,” is not difficult to find. However, each time the phrase is mentioned, the claim is qualified by another factor, such as the Jews were singled out to be given the Torah (see Blessings over the Torah), or the Jews were alone chosen to observe the Sabbath (see Sabbath *Amida*). The message that seems to peer through the prayers is that the nation of Israel was, in fact, singled out from among the other nations not in worth but, rather, to observe specific tasks. Thus, it can be recognized that Jewish People are not chosen out of innate supremacy, but rather to observe specific rituals.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch weaves all these rituals into one overarching task: to spread the Divine to the other nations of the world. The Israelites’ task is promote God and His moral code to the rest of the world. Similarly, by watching the activities of the Israelite nation, the other nations will gain insight into living a Godly life: when the Israelites follow God’s Will, they flourish, and when they transgress, they suffer. As a result, the nation of Israel was selected not out of innate superiority but

simply to be a separate people with a specific calling in the world. This is why the Israelites were given the Torah and Sabbath and all the other Commandments: if the other nations see the Jews living a life of *kedusha*, a unique, Godly life, they will desire to lead a similar life (R. Hirsch commentary on Deuteronomy 28: 37-45).

Indeed, this task of the Jewish nation can lead to misconceptions about Jewish supremacy. However, the Prophet Amos makes it clear that when the Israelites sin, God views them the same as any other nation (Amos 9: 7), if not more harshly (3: 2). As a result, it can be comprehended that being the Chosen Nation is not exclusively a good thing and does not strictly benefit the Jews, but the role sets them up for greater suffering, as well.

The status of Chosen Nation is simply a nation selected for a specific task, as Martin Buber writes "the People of Israel was charged to lead the way to righteousness and justice" (Buber, *Israel and the World*)-. Jews, in their nature, are not necessarily more righteous or just than other members of civilization, but rather are given the task to persevere to act righteously and justly for the rest of the world to see (R. Aryeh Kaplan presents a similar idea in his essay "If You Were God?", and Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovitz elaborates that each nation, be it Roman, British, or American, is entrusted with its own unique task, while it is the Jewish People's to spread the value of a religious and moral society).

In effect, the opening statement of Parshat Kedoshim does not express a Jews' natural elevated state, but, rather, a task to be fulfilled. Being a separate nation requires constant self-correction as well as the responsibility to the other nations of the world, a responsibility to spread goodness and spirituality throughout the four corners of the Earth. This past Pesach, we recognized this responsibility by being forced to constantly remember our past slavery as well as current freedom, a concept that reminds us of our call to use our past suffering to help the current suffering of those less fortunate. The Torah repeats numerous times: "do not oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt." This is the call Buber and other Jewish thinkers refer to when they clarify the Jewish role in the world.

The message is stressed by the reminder that while we are not literal slaves, we, as the Jewish People, still suffer today. During the weeks of *Sefirat haOmer*, we place ourselves in mourning to remind ourselves of the pain of Rabbi Akiva's students; during Yom haShoa on Monday, we will recount the brutality of the Holocaust only seventy years ago. We declare "Never Again" as a mantra for the survival of our people, but we must remember that our nation's vitality arises from our task as an *am kadosh* to spread morality and Godliness to the rest of the world, and declare Never Again for all people's, Jewish or not. Because the Jewish People are not superior to the surrounding cultures, but rather must heed the command in Kedoshim to act as a unique people and fulfill their given task with humility, for "you know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt" (Exodus 23: 9).

The Creation of a Free Nation: Pesach to Shavuot, Part 1 of 2

Mark Kaplan (14)

The Exodus from Egypt is one of the most important tenets of our faith. The Sefer haHinukh (Mitzva 21) writes that the Exodus from Egypt is "an important foundation and pillar of our Torah and Faith." Therefore "many Mitzvot are given because of

Yetzias Mitzrayim, commandments and prohibitions . . . and we often say in our benedictions and prayers 'Zeicher Letzias Mitzrayim,' 'in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt.'"

This idea is expressed in the Decalogue, where, in the first utterance, God tells the Israelites that "I am the Lord your God, *who took you out of the land of Egypt.*" Many commentators, such as Ibn Ezra and the Sefer haKuzari, ask why God chooses to mention, and not only mention, but define Himself, so to speak, as the cause for the Exodus from Egypt? It would have been more appropriate for Him to say "I am the Lord your God, *who created the Heavens and the Earth,*" which is a much more impressive miracle.

In the terminology of the philosophers and Kabbalists, the creation of the world is a process deemed *ex-nihilo*, a change from nothing to something, while the Exodus from Egypt was just a change from "something" to "something," as the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and were made free. Nevertheless, we see that the Exodus from Egypt is one of the foundations of our faith. This is even more evident considering the fact that the Exodus from Egypt happened in Nisan, and, because of this, Nisan is considered the first month in the Hebrew calendar. We also have a Mitzva to remember the Exodus every day, and we have an entire holiday dedicated to *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Passover. Why is the Exodus from Egypt such an important part of our religion? Before we were made slaves, we were considered free, and after we left Egypt, we were once again free, we returned to our previous state, that of freedom. Nothing extraordinary had occurred. The Israelites evolved from a family of seventy to a nation of about two million; however, we do not call Passover the "Holiday of Birthing," we call it *Zman Cherutenu*, the time of our freedom. The question that is even stronger is why is Yetziat Mitzrayim so crucial, as the Sefer haHinukh says, to our faith?

In the Haggada, it is written "If God had not taken us out of Egypt, we would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." What is the meaning of this statement, that even after thousands of years, if God had not taken us out we would still slaves!? That is incredibly improbable! Furthermore, our entire existence as a nation is through a miraculous fashion. Isaac was born because of a miracle, and, throughout our history, God has saved us from our oppressors. Why only on Pesach do we stress that, if God had not had compassion on us through his miracles, we would have remained oppressed? We do not stress this with a festival for Isaac's birth, nor do we stress this on the holiday of Purim, in which we were miraculously saved from Haman and his armies.

The explanation for all this is based on a speech from the Lubavitcher Rebbe and an essay by Rabbi Yoel Kahn. In general, there are two types of miracles: a one-time miracle and a continuous miracle. For example, when God told Moses to bring the news of the Israelites' redemption from Egypt, God gave Moses signs and miracles to show the nation in order for the Israelites to believe in Moses. One of them was to put his hand under his cloak, and the hand came out ridden with tzaarat. This miracle was a "one-time miracle." In one moment, a normal hand changed to a hand with Tzaarat.

On the other hand (pun intended), the miracle of the splitting of the Sea was a "continuous miracle." As verse twenty-one in chapter fourteen of Exodus states: "the Lord led the sea with the strong east wind all night, and He made the sea into dry land and the waters split." It is evident from the verse that the miracle continued throughout the night. As Ramban hints to in his comments on verse twenty-four the Godly power was infused

Shabbat Shalom!

into the eastern wind, and God wrought the miracle throughout the night in order for the water to stand like a wall. This was not a "one-time" miracle in which the waters miraculously changed into stones, rather, throughout the whole night, the Godly power invested in the water caused the water to stand like a wall of stones.

Moses's hand became a Tzaraas ridden hand. It was not a normal hand with Tzaraas miraculously on it; rather, after God's miracle, the essential nature of Moses's hand became a hand with Tzaraas on it. However, the water in the Sea of Reeds kept its nature, it stayed like water, and through God's miraculous power which continued throughout the night, it stood like a wall.

The difference between the two miracles is also seen when the Moses's hand and the Sea of Reeds returned to their natural states. In order to turn Moses's tzaraas ridden hand back to a normal hand, a second miracle was necessary. God told Moses to put his hand again into his cloak. Two miracles occurred, changing the normal hand to a hand with Tzaraas, and the change back to a normal hand. Moses's hand was changed into a tzaraas ridden hand through a "one-time" miracle and in order to change it back to its previous state a second "one-time" miracle was necessary.

This was not the case when God stopped the miracle of the splitting of the Sea. A second miracle was unnecessary. It was enough for the Godly power infused in the eastern wind to stop, and naturally the water stopped standing like a wall. Kriat Yam Suf was not a "one-time" miracle in which the waters miraculously transformed into a new essence, rather the Sea stayed as a natural, flowing sea, and the continuous Godly power affected every moment that in its "Chitzoniyyut," exterior, the water stood like a wall. And since the Sea's essence did not change, it was not necessary to cancel the Splitting of the Sea with a second miracle. It was only necessary for the Godly power to stop acting on the waters. This is seen from the verse that describes the end of the Splitting of the Sea, verse twenty-eight: "And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, the entire force of Pharaoh coming after them into the sea; not even one of them survived." The verse states the waters returned on their own, not that God brought about another miracle.

These two types of miracles are also seen in the ten plagues. When God brought the plague of the frogs, the miracle was in their creation, not in their existence after God created them. This was a one-time miracle in which God created many frogs, and after this miracle, they became a natural part of the world, and died through natural means. As chapter eight verse nine states "and the frogs died from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the fields."

The plague of blood was a continuous miracle. The Midrash notes that whenever an Israelite drank from a jug, water was in the jug, and when an Egyptian took the same jug, the water changed into blood. The reason for this is that the Miracle was a drawn-out, continuous miracle, every second the miracle caused that the water, in connection with the Egyptians, turned

into blood. The water stayed water, however in regards to the Egyptians, it turned into blood. It is not written in the Torah that the plague stopped (unlike many of the other plagues) through an additional miracle. Since it was a continuous miracle, once God's power stopped, the water stopped changing into blood in connection to the Egyptians.

This is the explanation of the blessing we say about our redemption in the Haggada, "Asher Ge'alanu" Blessed is God Who has taken US out of Egypt. God is taking us, this very moment, out of Egypt. God did not just "goal et avoteinu," "redeem our forefathers." He redeems us this very moment. What happened to our forefathers in Egypt on the fifteenth of Nissan in the year 2448 is a continuous action/miracle, it is happening to us this very second. That is why we are obligated, in the words of the Mishna in Pesachim, in every generation to "view OURSELVES as having been taken out of Egypt."

However, this idea itself needs an explanation: why indeed is our Exodus from Egypt a continuous miracle? Stay tuned next week for the answer and conclusion!

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