

# The Narrow Bridge

## גשר צר מאוד

### PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

#### Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Kedoshim

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לע'נ פּעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

#### **SOCIALLY ENGAGED**

##### Chasam Sofer

*"Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.'" (19:2)*

When the Torah tells *Klal Yisrael*: "*Kedoshim tihiyu* - You shall be holy," it is a commandment that requires them to elevate themselves spiritually. However, unlike the doctrines of other faiths, when Jews wish to grow in sanctity and purification, they don't run away to faraway mountains or seclude themselves behind forbidding walls with locked gates to protect them.

This law was spoken to the general public (Rashi), and it was meant to be carried out within the framework of the *kehillah*, socially engaged and productive, to better the individual as well as the community.

#### **JOINT HOLINESS**

##### Sefas Emes

*"Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.'" (19:2)*

The *pasuk* says, "Be holy." One can only be holy if he is an integral part of the congregation. Anyone who isolates himself and withdraws from his brethren cannot be considered holy, regardless of how much he tries to sanctify himself!

#### **READY TO RECEIVE**

##### Kotzker Rebbe

*"Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.'" (19:2)*

The word *kadosh* can be mean "to be ready." Therefore, this *pasuk* can be read, "You shall make yourself ready to receive My laws, for I, Hashem, am ready to give it to you."

#### **JEWISH PRIDE**

##### Divrei Sha'arei Chaim

*"Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.'" (19:2)*

This section was proclaimed in full assembly. (Rashi)

Don't be holy only in the privacy of your home but ashamed of your faith in public. Don't be, as the assimilationists put it, "A Jew at home and just a person outside."

Be holy "in full assembly," in public, out in the open, in society. Among your own people or in the midst of strangers, wherever you may find yourself, don't ever be ashamed of your character and sanctity as a Jew.

#### **NATURE'S DIVINITY**

##### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.'" (19:2)*

The Hebrew word for "holy" (*kadosh*) means "separate," "removed" and "beyond." G-d is absolutely and infinitely holy, for inasmuch as He created the world, He is beyond it, unlimited by time, space, or any other of its attributes. Thus, by being told that we are to be holy because G-d is holy, we are being told that we are able to partake of G-d's otherness, that the heights of holiness we can reach are infinite, just as G-d is infinite.

This means that as Jews, we are intended to live with the awareness that the laws of nature pose no contradiction to Divinity. There is no aspect of life that is beyond our capacity to elevate, so long as we are connected to G-d and act in accordance with His will.

Therefore, we can "sanctify" all aspects of our lives, even the most self-understood and commonplace. We should consider everything that we do to be part of our Divine mission, a way of bringing G-d into the world and making it into His home. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## ATTAINING HOLINESS

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

*“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)*

The commentators offer different explanations as to why the instruction of תהיו קדושים needed to be expressed with the introduction of בני ישראל, to “all the congregation of *Bnei Yisrael*,” and not the regular אל בני ישראל.

Rashi suggests that since “רוב גופי תורה תלויין בה” - The main substance of the Torah is dependent on it,” i.e., our fulfilling תהיו קדושים, it needed to be instructed to everyone gathered together in one place. What are these רוב גופי תורה?

The Torah Temimah suggests that Rashi is referring to the *mitzvah* of לרעך כמורך, וואהבת לרעך כמורך, which we find in this *parashah*, which Rabbi Akiva said is a “כלל גדול בתורה” - an all-encompassing obligation of the Torah.”

Therefore, since everything hinges on loving your friend as yourself, everyone needed to hear the *parashah* of תהיו קדושים all together.

The Chasam Sofer writes that Hashem does not want us to achieve a life of holiness by removing ourselves from society. Instead, the instruction of תהיו קדושים is given when we are all gathered together. This teaches us that holiness is only found in our actions as a community.

It is easy to be a *tzaddik* when there is no one around to pester you, to annoy you, or to disagree with you. The test is how we behave within society and how we deal with the challenges that living in society presents.

The Sefas Emes adds that תהיו קדושים was presented to the community so that we realize that only when we act united as a community can קדושה be attained. If each section of the community only works on perfecting themselves and is not worried about how they can help different parts of the community achieve success, then there can be קדושה, and no one attains sanctity. Only by working as בני ישראל, i.e., as one united congregation, can we successfully achieve תהיו קדושים.

Finally, the Alshich suggests that תהיו קדושים needed to be presented to the people gathered all together to emphasize that everyone can live a life of sanctity. It isn't a realm reserved for the select few, but rather it is within reach for every single Jew.

Had the Torah followed the usual prescription of דבר אל בני ישראל, there would have been those who, when hearing the words תהיו קדושים, would have said that Moshe wasn't really referring to him. How could he be expected to live a life of sanctity? After all, he was just a simple Jew.

However, when all the people gathered together and heard the words תהיו קדושים together, they realized that it applies to everyone. (Parpera'os LaTorah, p. 133)

## PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH

### Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

*“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)*

One cannot exhort others to proper behavior unless one practices what one preaches. Not only is it foolish to expect that others will do what one himself does not, but even if one's teachings are abided by, it is improper to teach what one does not do oneself.

Hashem says, “You shall be holy.” Refrain even from doing things which are permissible, for I, too, go beyond the letter of the law. Were it not for the fact that Hashem, too, does more than is necessary, He would not demand that Israel do the same.

## GUARANTEED SUSTENANCE

### Alexander Rebbe

*“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)*

A son of a wealthy father has no worries because his father will sustain him if he so desires. So too, Hashem will sustain those who desire to become holy.

## PAVING THE WAY

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)*

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) highlights a powerful insight based on these words. He explains that the Torah is teaching us that if we want someone to conduct themselves in a certain way, then we must ensure that we ourselves model that behavior for them.

We can't expect others to follow the right path if we are not doing so ourselves. Unlike a doctor who provides instructions or medications to their patients that are not applicable to themselves, if we want to inspire and motivate others to grow, then we must demonstrate those actions for them.

This is why Hashem “*b'chvodo ub'atzmo*” commands the Jewish people to be holy; He Himself is *Kadosh* and is, therefore, modeling it for us.

We all have aspirations for our children and hope that those dreams come to fruition. Rav Moshe is teaching us how to ensure that those ambitions become reality. We have to model what we value for our children so that they will integrate those behaviors into their lives. We have to ensure that we are who we say we are. With this approach in mind, we will be able to facilitate the growth and development of the next generation of *bnei* and *bnos* Torah.

## HOLY UNITY

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)

Rashi comments that this *parshah* was read while all of *Klal Yisrael* were gathered together.

The Sefas Emes comments that the reason this *parshah* was read with everyone congregated is because the only way for the Jewish people to achieve sanctity and holiness is to be unified as one. *Klal Yisrael's* ability to ascend to great spiritual heights was and is predicated on *Bnei Yisrael's achdus* [unity].

While we may not always agree with each other, it is important that we maintain peace and harmony. The strength and success of the Jewish people rests on our willingness to work hard to draw close to each other and ignore our differences. With this in mind, we will all be able to be *kedoshim*, living lives of sanctity and holiness

## GUARANTEED HOLINESS

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)

Rabbi Paysach Krohn says that sometimes we feel that it is important to live a Torah-observant life because if we look at the alternative, it appears to us as stale, unspiritual, unfulfilling, and meaningless. While this may or may not be true, the opening words in our *parashah* tell us that this is the incorrect approach.

The opening words are קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני ה' אלוקיכם, and they say that we need to live an ethical, worthwhile, and spiritual life, ה' אלוקיכם, כי קדוש אני ה' - for no other reason than that Hashem is *kadosh*. Even if the alternative lifestyles were honest, genuine, and fulfilling, we would still choose to live a Torah life, a life of spiritual growth, and a life of cultivating a relationship with The Almighty for no other reason than ה' אלוקיכם כי קדוש אני ה'!

We measure ourselves not by what we are not, but by what we are!

The *mefarshim* ask why the words קדושים תהיו are stated in the plural and not the singular tense. The Alshich suggests that this is to emphasize that real *kedushah*, real spiritual growth, and establishing a genuine relationship with Hashem, are only achievable as part of a community. *Kedushah* is not found by excluding oneself from interaction with other human beings for fear of speaking *lashon hara*. Spiritual growth is not achieved by isolating oneself and not facing the challenges that regular social interaction brings. Instead, *kedushah* is found when we are part of a collective, when we act in the plural - קדושים תהיו. We interact, are part of, and contribute to *Am Yisrael*, and all the while we overcome the challenges that threaten *kedushah*.

Rabbi Yechezkel Halberstam, the son of the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz, asks why the word תהיו is in the future tense. Why doesn't the Torah say “קדושים היו” - Be holy,” in the imperative form?

Rabbi Yechezkel explains that the Torah is informing us that we have a promise from Hashem that in the future we will be *kedoshim v'tehorim*. We will merit redemption, as the Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 7:5) says that the Torah promises that we will all eventually do *teshuvah* and be redeemed.

Hence, קדושים תהיו - do not become distraught, nervous, or pressured that your efforts will be in vain and that you will not attain *kedushah* and the benefits that accompany it. You will, we all will, and Mashiach will herald in an era of sanctity and holiness.

May this moment arrive very soon.

## AVAILABLE TO ALL

### Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)

Parashas Kedoshim begins with an unusual event. Sometime after the revelation at Sinai, Moshe specifically gathered all the Jewish People to teach them the particular laws found at the beginning of Kedoshim. This was a unique experience. Although Moshe taught the entire Torah to the Jewish People, in this instance, Moshe assembled the Jewish People to teach them all together at the same time. The first teaching in this gathering was “*Kedoshim tihyu*,” the obligation to sanctify ourselves, to make ourselves *kadosh*, holy.

The famed *mashgiach* of Slabodka, Rabbi Avraham Grodzinski, Hy”d, in his work *Toras Avraham*, points out that at first glance, this law of personal sanctity would not seem to be appropriate for the masses. There are many Jewish laws that can be relevant for the breadth of the Jewish community, such as Shabbos, or honoring parents. Genuine *kedushah*, sanctity, however, would seem to be appropriate for the *tzaddikim*. Can sanctity be relevant for the masses, the men, the women, and the children? Yet, as Moshe gathers the entire nation, the first directive he gives at this gathering in the desert is “*kedoshim tihyu*,” be holy.

The *Toras Avraham* explains that every Jew has a *neshamah* that is inherently *kadosh* and is therefore able to connect to *kedushah*, holiness. Whenever a Jew connects to Hashem and the Torah, he unveils a bit more of his inner sanctity. It was (and is!) essential for every single Jewish man, woman, and child, to hear from Moshe directly that as a Jew, no matter the stage one is in, the work done to connect to Hashem is saintly and holy; a genuine *kedushah*. Sanctity is not reserved for the especially righteous amongst us. We, as Jews, sanctify ourselves every day through the work we do to develop our unique connection to Hashem and the Torah.

## BEYOND RATIONALE

### Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

*“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)*

Rashi, quoting Sifra, comments that the Torah speaks here to “the entire assembly” because the majority of the Torah’s essential laws are contained here (Rashi from Sifra).

Actually, there are numerous other sections of the Torah that contain many *mitzvos*, and it is unclear what it is that makes this section more significant than others. Perhaps Rashi means that in this section the various types of *mitzvos* are mentioned, and it includes both חקִים, decrees, without an apparent rationale, and מִשְׁפָּטִים, ordinances, which have an apparent rationale, *mitzvos* between man and G-d and those between man and his fellow. They are intermingled in this way to teach us that we must observe them all, as a servant obeys his master regardless of whether he understands the reason for the command or not. Thus, this combination will ensure that the majority of the essential laws of the Torah will be obeyed.

## CLINGING TO TRADITION

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*“Every man shall revere his mother and his father and revere My Shabbosos – I am Hashem, your G-d.” (19:3)*

What is the connection between revering ones parents and observing Shabbos? While the Gemara (Bava Metzia 32a) offers one explanation, Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky (Emes L’Yaakov) provides an alternative suggestion. He notes that the obligation to honor and be in awe of one’s parents is based on the belief in Shabbos. Namely, Shabbos represents our recognition that there is a Creator Who created the very world we live in. If one believes that to be the case, then it would stand to reason that each generation closer to that introduction of *kedushah* and G-dliness should be respected. However, if one denies that there is a Creator, then why would one honor previous generations that seem antiquated and primitive? It is for this reason that the Torah, in multiple places, links the *mitzvah* of honor and fearing one’s parents to observing Shabbos.

We live in a world today that is hyper focused on the future. We are all constantly fixated on new advancements in technology, medicine and the like. As a result, people fall into the trap of thinking, feeling and believing that religion, ancestry and history are simply ideas of the past, with no bearing on who we are and who we will become. Rav Yaakov is reminding us to ensure that our connections to the past are strong. Yiddishkeit is based on our mesorah (tradition), which we must tightly cling to. Our parents and grandparents hold the keys to *kedushah*. For *Klal Yisrael* to be stronger than ever, we must hold onto the past in order to build the future.

## FULL PARTICIPATION REQUIRED

### Sefas Emes

*“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)*

Rashi points out that we can be worthy of attaining such holiness only if we merge our own personalities into the larger community and identify completely with the people of Israel. Only “in full assembly” can we be holy.

## STRIVING FOR MORE

### Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

*“You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.” (19:2)*

The Torah tells us “*Kedoshim tihyu* - Be holy!” The Midrash explains that after reading this directive, one may make the mistake of thinking he could be as *kadosh*, as holy, as the Almighty. Therefore, the verse continues, “*Ani Hashem* - I am Hashem,” clarifying that Hashem’s *kedushah* is above ours; only He is entirely holy, not us. What is the meaning of this Midrash? Would any rational person make the mistake of believing he could be as holy as Hashem? It was awkward enough for me to even write these words on paper; to believe them would just be bizarre.

Rashi directly links *kedushah* with boundaries. He writes, “Wherever one finds a barrier against immorality, one finds holiness.” Implementing safeguards that distance ourselves from immorality is the defined way for us to attain *kedushah*. However, the modality we use remains undefined; this makes sense, as creating a safeguard is by definition subjective. Every person has their distinct experiences and background, which means their challenges are also individualized. Unique challenges demand unique safeguards.

Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein, in his work, *Shem MiShmuel*, points out that this is why the directive “be holy” was specifically told to all of Israel. *Kedushah* is linked to the personal safeguards we create; therefore, everyone can connect to *kedushah* in their own way. The most derelict alongside the most holy can always do more to enhance their *kedushah* by distancing themselves further from the immorality they are exposed to.

I once heard someone use this idea to explain the Midrash as well. Creating boundaries is loosely defined. Without clear guidelines, we are prone to believe that this directive is not relevant for us. We can make the mistake of feeling “holy enough” even though we may not be. The Midrash teaches that the Almighty addressed this flawed approach directly. The verse ends, “I am Hashem,” implying that “holy enough” is only for G-d. The takeaway is that our *kedushah* is not a state we strive to reach, but it is a life’s mission. Complacency is forbidden; we can and must always do more to improve our spiritual observance by continuously developing our lifestyle in a way that distances us from spiritual harm.

## PREPARED AND READY

### The Chida

*“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.’” (19:2)*

A Jew should always be prepared (קדושים תהיו) to do *mitzvos* and good deeds, just as Hashem is always ready and willing (כי קדוש אני ה') to assist a Jew in his time of need.

## ONCE A CHILD, ALWAYS A CHILD

### Kesav Sofer

*“Every man shall revere his mother and his father and revere My Shabbosos – I am Hashem, your G-d.” (19:3)*

You must honor your parents not only while you are still dependent on them for your food, clothing, and support, but when you are a “man,” i.e., an adult and no longer dependent.

## PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*“Every man shall revere his mother and his father and revere My Shabbosos – I am Hashem, your G-d.” (19:3)*

The Yid Hakadosh zt'l of P'shischah was studying an intricate Talmudic subject with his students. Contemplating a question that was posed by one of the students, he became so engrossed that he lost track of time.

One of his students had not yet eaten that day and was beginning to feel sharp hunger pangs. Aware that the rebbe would probably be wrapped up in his thoughts for quite some time, he quickly ran home and ate.

He was almost out the door when his mother called to him, “Please, can you climb up to the attic and bring down a sack of straw for me?”

In a rush to return to the rebbe's shiur, the young man replied, “Mother, the rebbe may have finished thinking about the question and is ready to explain the answer. I can't afford to be late!”

The mother sighed understandingly. “Fine, my son. Go back to your learning. I'm sorry to have bothered you.”

The boy was speedily heading back to the rebbe's house when he suddenly stopped in his tracks. “What is the matter with me? I am missing the point! Torah learning must lead to action; why didn't I help my mother?” he rebuked himself.

He quickly turned around, apologized to his mother and climbed up to the attic to bring down the straw. Then, in a flash, he ran back to the shiur.

Just as he breathlessly walked into the rebbe's house, the rebbe picked up his head and flashed him a broad smile.

“What great *mitzvah* did you just do to deserve such a special escort? Do you know who accompanied you here?”

The young man stood in the doorway shamefaced, while the other students wondered what the rebbe saw that they could not. “When you walked in,” he continued, “I saw the Amora (Talmudic sage) Abaye escorting you. He enlightened me as to the solution of the problem we were grappling with. Tell me, how did you merit such illustrious company?”

Blushing, the young lad told the rebbe everything that had transpired.

The Yid Hakadosh lovingly caressed the youngster as he explained to his students. “Abaye was orphaned from both parents. It was for this reason that he received his name, which is an acronym of “אשר בך ירחם יתום” - For it is with You that an orphan finds pity” (Hoshea 14:4). Abaye never had the opportunity to honor his parents. Therefore, his spirit comes to accompany those who make great effort to fulfill this *mitzvah*.”

## PROTECT THE CHILDREN

### HaDerash VeHalyun

*“You shall not harvest the young grapes of your vineyard; and you shall not gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them - I am Hashem, your G-d.” (19:10)*

You shall not take the tender grapes of it. (Rashi)

Take exceptional care that the children, the tender grapes of Israel's vineyard, will not be plucked from Judaism's stem and estranged from their people.

## ATTAINING AWE

### Rebbe Nachman

*“You shall not curse a deaf person, and you shall not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person....” (19:14)*

Regarding commandments for which one's intentions in fulfilling or transgressing the commandment cannot be known by other people, scripture states: “Fear your Lord” - for G-d knows a person's thoughts. (Rashi)

The fear of G-d is a great achievement in itself. However, it must be complemented by *da'as* (knowledge of G-d). This *da'as* must be in the heart, which is the place of fear.

When a person draws his fear into his heart, his fear will bring him to a greater understanding of G-d, as it is written (Mishlei 2:5), “Then you will understand the fear of G-d, and the knowledge of the Lord you will find.”

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*Yerushalayim* (ירושלים, Jerusalem) is a contraction of the words *Yirah Shalem* (יראה שלם, perfected fear). *Yerushalayim* represents the heart, as in (Yeshayah 40:2), “Speak to the heart of Yerushalayim.” (See Likutey Moharan I, 20:4)

Thus, the heart is the seat of fear of G-d. One who brings the fear of G-d into his heart can perfect that fear. This is akin to the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, which is associated with the Messianic era. (See Likutey Moharan II, 1:4)

## PREMEDITATED ACTIONS

### Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

*“You shall not curse a deaf person, and you shall not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person; and you shall have fear of your G-d - I am Hashem.” (19:14)*

This includes giving bad advice to one who is “blind” in a certain area. Do not say to another, “Sell your field and buy yourself a donkey,” and then steal his donkey (Rashi from Sifra).

Strange as it may seem, one who covets someone else’s possessions which are inaccessible, and advises that party to purchase something which is easier to steal, is worse than an ordinary thief. This is because he has also committed the sin of proffering bad advice. A person is punished for committing the sin itself, as well as for all the means he employed to enable himself to commit that sin, for which he is punished separately.

Another difference between the ordinary thief and one who gives bad advice to facilitate his thievery is that the ordinary thief often perpetrates the robbery in a moment of weakness when he is overwhelmed by his evil inclination. The one who gives bad advice, however, has planned his action carefully and has ample time to refrain from carrying out his scheme. If he carries through, it is not on a sudden impulse, but the result of careful planning. Consequently, his punishment is much more severe.

The same applies to the performance of *mitzvos*. One who performs a *mitzvah* is rewarded for the act of the *mitzvah* itself in addition to the means he used to enable himself to perform that *mitzvah*.

## CONSIDER THEIR STRUGGLES

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*“You shall not do wrong in justice; you shall not favor a destitute man and you shall not honor a great man; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow.” (19:15)*

The Torah commands, בצדק תשפוט עמיתך - “You shall judge your fellow justly” (19:15). Chazal interpreted this pasuk as introducing the obligation to judge others לכף זכות - favorably. As the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (1:6) famously teaches, לאדם כל האדם לכף זכות, - we are to give people the benefit of the doubt.

The Gemara in Masseches Shabbos (127b) states, הדין חבירו - one who judges others favorably is rewarded by being judged favorably by Hashem.

At first glance, this seems readily understandable, a classic example of the principle of מידה כנגד מידה – “measure for measure,” that we are treated the way we act. If we are accustomed to judging favorably, then we are deserving of being judged favorably. But when we think about it, this rule actually seems very difficult. The notion of judging favorably stems from the fact that we never know the whole story. When we see somebody walking into a non-kosher restaurant, we don’t know if he is going to order a cheeseburger, or if he needs to use the restroom or buy a bottle of water. When we run into someone in a store and he doesn’t say hello, we don’t know if he chose not to be friendly, or if he is feeling unwell, perhaps suffering from a migraine headache, or maybe he didn’t see us. The requirement to judge לכף זכות obligates us to choose the more favorable possibility, rather than assume the worst. But how is this at all relevant to Hashem’s assessment of us? He is all-knowing, He has all the information, He knows exactly what we are doing and why we are doing it. He sees the whole story. What, then, does the Gemara mean when it says that Hashem judges favorably those who judge others favorably? How does this work?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in Megged Yosef, explains that people are exceedingly complex. There are countless factors that affect the way a person conducts himself. These factors include genetic predispositions, tendencies ingrained from birth, everything he’s experienced in his past, scars from his childhood, influences from his youth, all the many different people he was exposed to throughout his life, and all the many different sets of circumstances that he faced. And of course there are many others. When we act wrongly, we want Hashem to take all these factors into consideration. This request is expressed in the beautiful תפילה זכה prayer which many have the custom to recite at the onset of Yom Kippur, before *Kol Nidrei*. In this tefilla, we say:

ועתה ה' אלוקי, גלוי וידוע לפניך שלא התכוונתי בכל החטאים והעוונות להכעיסך ולמרוד כנגדך, אך הלכתי בעצת יצרי הרע אשר תמיד בכל יום פורש רשת לרגלי ללכדני, ואני עני ואביון, תולעת ולא איש, כשל כוחי לעמוד כנגדו

*And now, Hashem my G-d, it is revealed and known before You that I did not intend in all my sins and transgressions to anger You or rebel against You, but rather I followed the counsel of my evil inclination, which daily spreads a net for my feet to ensnare me. And I am poor and needy, a worm and not a man, my strength has failed to stand against it...*

We do not deny our wrongdoing, we do not insist that we always got it right, and we accept blame for our mistakes and failings. However, we beseech Hashem to see the whole picture, to take into account our pressures, our temptations, our fears, our anxieties, our weaknesses. We are saying to Hashem, “I know I failed, but You know how hard it is. You know my struggles and my challenges, so please judge me favorably.”

And this is how we are to judge others, as well. Even if we know precisely why they walked into the non-kosher restaurant, and even we see them eating the cheeseburger - even then, we still don't have all the information. We do not know about their challenges. Everyone has struggles that nobody else knows about, and so we can never judge. If we see people acting wrongly, we need to acknowledge that we know so little about them, their background, the pressures they are under, and the challenges that they face. Hillel famously teaches in Pirkei Avos (2:4), אל תדין את חברך עד שתגיע, - למקומו - "Do not judge your fellow until you reach his place." We can never truly be in someone else's place, because we are limited, and will never fully understand another person's story, why he does what he does. Therefore, we must reserve judgment, humbly acknowledging that there is so much more than our eyes can ever see.

And the Gemara promises that if we look at people this way, then Hashem will look at us this way, as well. He will take into account our struggles, all the many different factors that contributed to our bad decisions and judge us favorably.

## **MIRRORED JUDGEMENT**

### **Baal Shem Tov**

*"You shall not do wrong in justice; you shall not favor a destitute man and you shall not honor a great man; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow." (19:15)*

Judge your friend favorably. (Rashi)

When the prophet Nason went to Dovid HaMelech to rebuke him, he told Dovid HaMelech the story of a poor man who was robbed of the only lamb he had. Deeply affected by the report, Dovid HaMelech ordered the thief put to death. Only then did Nason reveal that the story had been a parable illustrating what Dovid HaMelech had done and that, in condemning the alleged thief to death, Dovid HaMelech had pronounced his own sentence. (II Shmuel 12)

G-d proceeds similarly with anyone due to be punished for a transgression. The person is recounted the story of his or her sin in slightly disguised form, as if it had been committed by someone else. Outraged by the report, the person harshly condemns the alleged sinner, and in this way the person actually pronounces his or her own sentence.

Therefore, the Sages tell us: "Judge your friend favorably." Don't be quick to pass sentence on another, for it is said: "Don't judge your fellow until you have been in his place." Know that if you are placed in a position to pass sentence on another, it is only because you have already been in the same place. You have committed the same wrong, and therefore when you condemn the person you are actually condemning yourself. Hence, if you judge the person with an inclination in the person's favor, you are only being kind to your own self.

A similar thought is conveyed by Psalm 39:9: "Deliver me from my transgressions; don't make me the reproach of the ignoble person." Dovid HaMelech says to G-d: Save me from my transgressions so that I shall not be punished for them. Let me not be one of those who reproves other people for base conduct. For if I refrain from condemning him, I will be delivered from punishment for my own sins that are equal to his.

## **BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"You shall not do wrong in justice; you shall not favor a destitute man and you shall not honor a great man; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow." (19:15)*

Our sages exhort us to "be extremely humble in relation to every person" (Avos 4:10), i.e., to consider ourselves less worthy than anyone else. Yet, objectively speaking, how can we consider ourselves less meritorious than those who appear to be unworthy of our respect?

The answer is by keeping in mind the sages teaching: "Do not judge your fellow until you reach his place" (Avos 2:4). In other words, we all have our challenges; the fact that we do not succumb to a particular temptation while another person does, does not make us superior to him. Who can measure the effect of his upbringing, environment, or inborn character weaknesses against the temptations he faces?

By judging our fellows favorably - or better yet, by not judging them at all - we can both cultivate our own humility more effectively and allow our fellows' positive traits to manifest themselves unhindered. Both of these effects help hasten the advent of the Redemption. (Tanya, chapter 30) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **SEEING THEIR ENTIRETY**

### **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

*"You shall not do wrong in justice; you shall not favor a destitute man and you shall not honor a great man; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow." (19:15)*

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz offers a different insight into the Gemara's teaching about judging other people favorably. He explains that the requirement to judge favorably refers not only to our assessment of specific actions, but also our overall assessment of the person. The question is not simply whether the individual acted properly or improperly in a particular circumstance, but rather how we view him after that incident.

Everyone in our lives - our spouse, our children, other family members, our coworkers, our friends - do many things we like, and also some things which we do not like. The Mishnah instructs, הוּי דן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת, - that we should not evaluate people based solely on their occasional mistakes, on their faults and shortcomings. As many have pointed out, the Mishnah speaks of judging כָּל הָאָדָם, which literally means, "the entirety of the person."

Our overall assessment of a person must be לכף זכות, favorable. Of course, there will be things about people that we do not like. But we must avoid judging and defining them based on those flaws and those failures. If a trusted friend doesn't return our call, or doesn't come through for us when we need a favor, this is not a reason to throw away the friendship. We should focus our attention on all those times when he did return our calls, and when he did come through. And the same is true of all our relationships.

This is what the Gemara means when it promises that if we treat people favorably, then Hashem will judge us favorably. If we focus on the fine qualities of the people around us, on everything they do right, instead of directing our attention toward their faults, then Hashem will, in turn, focus on our good deeds, on all the mitzvos we perform, instead of focusing on our occasional wrongdoing.

## **PROPER PRIORITIES**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"You shall not go about gossiping among the people. You shall not stand [idly] over the blood of your friend. I am Hashem." (19:16)*

Toras Kohanim states the following concept: "If you see someone drowning in the river or bandits attacking him, you must save him. As it says, 'Lo sa'amod al dam rayacha - do not stand on your friend's blood.'" A Jew must do everything to help rescue another Jew in danger.

The daughter of R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l related that one morning, R' Yosef Chaim did not return home from shul after *Shacharis* like usual. His concerned family began to look for him, and soon spotted the elderly *tzaddik* standing over a well, drawing bucket after bucket of water and handing them to two small children. One child would take a bucket of water home and run back with an empty bucket, which he would give to R' Yosef Chaim to fill up once again.

R' Yosef Chaim's daughter ran over to her father. "Tatte, Tatte, what are you doing? Have you become the neighborhood water-carrier?"

R' Yosef Chaim finished with the children and made sure they got home safely with the water. He then turned to his daughter and said, "I was returning home from shul this morning when I saw these two little ones, children of a poor *talmid chacham*, trying to draw water from the well. It is a very dangerous task for such small children, for they can easily fall into the well and drown, G-d forbid. I asked them why they were doing this job, and they answered that there was no water in their house. Their father was ill, their mother just gave birth, and they couldn't afford to pay a water-carrier, so they decided to draw water themselves. When I heard that, I took off my *tallis* and *tefillin* and began to help them."

"But Tatte," said his daughter, still bothered, "is it fitting that a Rav act like a water-carrier? What will people say about this?"

R' Yosef Chaim answered, "And what would they say in Heaven if I had gone home instead, neglecting two small children who were endangering their lives to try to help their parents?!"

## **DON'T MAKE IT WORSE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"You shall not go about gossiping among the people..." (19:16)*

According to the Talmud, gossip "kills" three people: the speaker, the listener, and the object of the gossip. That the speaker and listener deserve to be punished is understandable, but why should the person about whom they are gossiping suffer?

The answer is that speaking about another person's shortcomings does more than just belittle him. Words have the power to bring latent energy into actuality. When we speak about a person's negative traits, it causes him to continue to manifest them, which in turn reinforces them. As a result, his behavior takes a turn for the worse and he thus incurs punishment.

Conversely, when we speak about the good traits of another person, we reveal and reinforce those traits. We can thus be a positive or negative influence on people; the choice is ours.

It is not only prohibited to speak derogatorily about someone; it is also prohibited to think about them derogatorily. In some ways, thinking negatively about someone is more serious than speaking negatively about them. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **RAISE THEM UP**

### **Chavos Yair**

*"You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him." (19:17)*

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "You shall surely rebuke your friend and do not place sin upon him."

In rebuking someone, don't treat this person as someone who is evil, but stress this person's dignity, making the person understand that the wrong that was committed was beneath his or her dignity. Only in this way will your rebuke have the desired effect.

This, then, is the thought the Torah seeks to convey: "You shall surely rebuke" - if you reprove someone, regard him "as your friend" and your equal, and "do not place sin upon him" - don't treat him like a sinner, which may cause him to turn aside from you entirely and you will then have accomplished nothing.

## **PURE INTENTIONS**

### **Sifsei Tzaddikim**

*"You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him." (19:17)*

A scholar who does not avenge and guard in the manner of the serpent is not a scholar. (Yoma 22)

It is written in the Midrash: "If you ask a serpent: 'What pleasure do you get from biting a human? Does not all the food you eat taste like soil to you?', he will reply: 'I do not bite for the sake of pleasure but only when G-d commands me to bite a person because he must be punished for some transgression.'"

Thus, the Sages say that when a scholar wants to rebuke someone who insulted him, he must do it "in the manner of the serpent" - not in order to satisfy his personal honor but only for the purpose of preserving the Torah's honor, of fulfilling G-d's command. One who is unable to rebuke "in the manner of the serpent" but is solely out for vengeance is not a true scholar. (Said in the name of the Baal Shem Tov)

## **TALK IT OUT**

### **Toldos Yizchak**

*"Do not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him." (19:17)*

One should not maintain a grudge but should "reprove him" and discuss with him that which bothers him.

"Do not bear a sin because of him," for after the discussion you may find out that he is really not guilty of your suspicion.

## **CAUTIOUS REBUKE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him." (19:17)*

Rebuke is a delicate matter; if done improperly, it can cause more harm than good. Thus, the instruction to admonish our friend when we see him doing something wrong is preceded by the instruction not to hate our brother, for rebuke should be only motivated by love, remaining free of barbs and caustic remarks.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch compared rebuke to administering an injection: the needle must be free of any germs; the doctor and his attendants must wear clean, white clothes and sterilize their hands. Similarly, someone giving rebuke must have pure motives (his "clothes," i.e., means of expression - thought, word, and deed - must be "white") and be assured his "injection" will not cause harm. (Igrot Kodesh Admor Mehorayatz, vol. 3, p. 291) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## **PERSONALIZED ATTENTION**

### **Divrei Torah**

*"You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him." (19:17)*

In rebuking someone, address him in keeping with his qualities, his intellectual abilities and his character.

Do not rebuke someone in terms of your own qualities. "You shall surely rebuke your friend" - Rebuke him as your friend, as he is and not as you are.

## **MAINTAINING DIGNITY**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him." (19:17)*

Do not embarrass him in public. (Rashi)

Although it is a *mitzvah* to rebuke someone for acting improperly, it is worse to embarrass him, for this can lead to arguments and strife. It is better to remain silent than to be the cause of strife. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 167a)

## **THE SCENT OF REBUKE**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him." (19:17)*

Rabbi Akiva once exclaimed: "I doubt if there is anyone in this generation who is capable of giving rebuke!" (Erkhin 16b; see Ein Yaakov).

There is an art to giving rebuke. If a person is unfit to rebuke others, not only does his rebuke have no effect, but he even arouses the stench of the wicked deeds and evil traits of the wrongdoer.

If something that has an offensive odor is left alone, its smell is undetected. But if someone moves the object, it will again give off an offensive odor. So too, if a person sins and then goes on with his life, the stench of his sins lies dormant. Should he be rebuked improperly, that may arouse the energy of those sins, whose "stench" will then harm him.

One who gives rebuke must be able to arouse in the other person a remorse that will be beneficial to his spiritual growth.

Moshe was someone who was fit to give rebuke, as his moral guidance bestowed a pleasant scent upon those who had sinned. When the Jews made the golden calf, Moshe rebuked them in a way that inspired them to attain complete repentance.

They went on to build the Tabernacle and experience an open manifestation of G-d's Presence in their midst. (See Likutey Moharan II, 8:1; See also Likutey Halakhot V, p. 96)

## **RESPONDING TO HATE**

### **Baal Shem Tov**

*“Do not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him.” (19:17)*

If one Jew hates another, even without acting upon it in speech or action, he transgresses a prohibition. If a Jew hates you, he is sinning, and you should perform *ahavat Yisrael* by preventing him from hating you.

“You shall surely rebuke your brother.” The verb *“hocheiach”* (rebuke) also means “prove,” implying that you must proactively approach the individual who hates you to discover the cause of the problem. No doubt it has something to do with his perception of your reverence for G-d; he believes you acted contrary to the Torah. *Hocheiach*. Prove yourself. Demonstrate the innocence of your conduct.

If you did nothing wrong, why must you bear the burden of proof? For the Torah states, *“Lo tisa alav cheit, do not incur a sin because of him.”* This can be translated as: “Do not cause a sin to be placed upon him.” You have an obligation of *ahavat Yisrael*, which includes preventing others from sinning.

## **JOINT RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Sefas Emes**

*“You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him.” (19:17)*

An alternative rendering of this passage is: “You shall surely rebuke yourself with your friend.”

When you rebuke your friend, rebuke yourself at the same time. Know that you, too, have a share in your friend’s transgression. Don’t cast the entire burden of sin upon him. Only if you will feel guilty and repent together with him will your rebuke persuade him to repent also.

## **PROCEED WITH CAUTION**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“You shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him.” (19:17)*

Rebuking one’s fellow man is a great *mitzvah* in the Torah. However, like all *mitzvos*, it must be carried out according to *halachah*. If one is not exacting in carrying out the laws of rebuke properly, the damage can be so great that one may even be guilty of some of the worst sins between a person and his fellow man.

At the end of his life, Moshe Rabbeinu taught us the correct way in which one should rebuke another person. First, the words must be completely and sincerely spoken for the benefit of the other person. If the one rebuking feels any personal aggrandizement, even the slightest feeling of selfish pride, then the rebuke must not be said!

Also, when a person is criticized, he can be made to feel worthless; thus, timing is of crucial importance. We learn from Moshe that criticism can only be administered when the recipient is feeling good about himself, as he chose to rebuke the people after their victory in war. Additionally, Moshe rebuked the nation at the very end of his life during his last thirty-seven days. He waited until then because he knew that at that time his words would be especially meaningful and accepted. Most importantly, Moshe rebuked *Bnei Yisrael* using hints. He did not mention their sins outright. He was first and foremost concerned about their honor.

One who rebukes another without following these guidelines or with any ulterior motives is in no way fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *hocheiach tochiach es amisecha*, but rather he is guilty of causing pain and harm to a fellow Jew. Furthermore, one must be careful that after he has given rebuke he does not forget the second part of the *pasuk*: *v’lo sisa alav chet* - he should not throw the sin on his friend and he should not hurt his feelings in any way.

## **SELF-INTROSPECTION**

### **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

*“You shall surely rebuke your fellow...” (19:17)*

The Torah commands us to offer constructive criticism to those who act wrongly in order to influence them to change. Rav Yisrael Salanter noted the significance of the word *את* in this *pasuk*. We find in numerous contexts that Chazal understood the word *את* as alluding to an extension of the law being introduced in that phrase. Thus, for example, the Torah commands *את ה'אלוקיך תירא*, that we must have fear of G-d, and Rabbi Akiva explained the word *את* as indicating that we must also show reverence for *talmidei chachamim* (Pesachim 22b). Similarly, the Torah commands blessing Hashem after eating (Devarim 8:10) - *ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה'אלוקיך* - the extra word *את* is understood as alluding to the requirement to bless one’s host. The word expands the *halachah* to include something which is not mentioned in the *pasuk*.

Rav Yisrael thus wondered how the word *את* in the command *תוכיח את עמיתך* expands this *mitzva*. Whom could the Torah possibly require a person to reprimand besides the person he sees acting wrongly?

The answer, Rav Yisrael Salanter explained, is that the Torah refers to the *מוכיח* himself. Before criticizing one’s fellow for acting improperly, one must first look in the mirror. He needs to first introspect and determine if perhaps he is also deficient in the area about which he finds fault in his fellow. Before we offer criticism, we must honestly ask ourselves, “Am I really in a position to criticize? Am I really that much better than this fellow? Perhaps I need to improve in this regard just like he does? Do I really have the right to tell this person that he needs to change his conduct?” *תוכיח את עמיתך*, if we are going to criticize somebody, we must criticize ourselves first.

## LOOKING INWARDS

### Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

*“You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke your fellow and not bear sin because of him.” (19:17)*

This week’s combined Parshah is packed with seventy-nine *mitzvos*. Let us focus on one of those *mitzvos* here. The Torah says, הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ - “you shall surely rebuke your fellow Jew.” The *mitzvah* to give rebuke is a very difficult *mitzvah*. No one likes to be criticized, and no one likes to be the one to criticize someone else. The Torah instructs us, however, to rebuke someone when we see him doing something wrong.

The Ben Ish Chai relates a story which sheds great insight into the Torah’s use of the doubled expression of rebuke, הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ:

There was once a poor man who stole money from a wealthy individual in the community in order to buy food for his family. In those days, stealing was considered a capital offense, and the poor man was brought before the king who sentenced him to death.

Before his execution, the poor man told the king that he has a special talent that may be of interest to the king. He is able to plant seeds which, within a very short time, grow into beautiful trees. The king said, “That sounds like a very useful talent to have. Teach us the secret to your special knowledge before we execute you.”

The king’s servants asked the poor man what supplies he needed. The poor man said that he needed a room, seeds, and some special potions which he will need to pour into the soil. The supplies were brought to him, and the poor man arranged the potions. He then told the royal servants that he needs to speak to the king again. They brought him before the king, and the poor man said, “Your majesty, in order for this special procedure to work, I need one more thing. The seeds must be planted by someone who has never stolen in his life. Since I have now stolen, the trees will not grow properly if I plant the seeds. Perhaps call your prime minister to do it instead.”

The king summoned his prime minister to come and plant the seeds. When the minister heard the prerequisite, he mumbled that he vaguely recalls that he might have stolen something when he was a child, and perhaps it would be best to ask someone else to plant the seeds. The king’s treasurer is then summoned, but he, too, refuses to plant the seeds, explaining that he deals with so much money on a regular basis that he cannot be absolutely certain that he has never accidentally stolen.

After these two highly reputable individuals refused to plant the seeds, the poor man said to the king, “I have an idea. Let your majesty, the king, plant the seeds!”

The king’s face turned to a shade of white and he sputtered that when he was a little boy, he stole some of his father’s treasures. The poor man then seized his opportunity to exonerate himself.

“All three of you wealthy, prestigious, esteemed individuals have stolen in your lives, and you’re sentencing me to death for stealing to provide a little food for my family!?” The king yielded to his plea and let the poor man go free.

The Ben Ish Chai says that this story explains the doubled expression the Torah uses when commanding a person to rebuke his fellow Jew. “הוֹכַח” - first rebuke yourself; first take an honest look at yourself before rebuking your fellow Jew. I often see in others the very same thing I am guilty of myself. Before judging others and before rebuking someone else, I must take a look at myself, and only afterwards may I be “תּוֹכִיחַ” - may I rebuke my fellow Jew.

## LOVE THE HURDLE

### Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

Rav Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Moharan I, 165) offers a remarkable interpretation of this *pasuk*, suggesting reading the word רַעַךְ to mean “your evil,” the רַע in a person’s life, the hardships and challenges that a person endures. We are to “love,” to accept and embrace, not only the countless blessings that we enjoy, but also the רַע, the difficulties that we face. This *pasuk* concludes אֲנִי ה' - “I am Hashem,” using the name *Havaya* (יְהוָה), which connotes G-d’s quality of mercy and compassion. Even the רַע in our lives is a manifestation of Hashem’s kindness. When we surrender entirely to the divine will, and fully place our trust in G-d, then we will be able to embrace even רַעַךְ, life’s hardships and struggles.

Rav Nachman explains the word כַּמּוֹךְ to mean that the hardships we endure are for us, precisely what Hashem decided that we need to experience in order to get to where we need to go, to achieve what we are to achieve, and to become the people that we are supposed to become. As difficult as it may be to realize while we are struggling, while we are going through whatever ordeal we are dealing with, the challenges we face help build us and facilitate our growth. וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרַעַךְ כַּמּוֹךְ. We are to embrace life’s challenges because they are precisely what we need to realize our potential.

Rav Nachman here teaches us to try to “love” even that which is painful in our lives, to recognize the value of life’s challenges, and appreciate the important role they play in bringing us to where we need to go.

The more we reinforce our faith that that everything that happens is, ultimately, אֲנִי ה' - a manifestation of Hashem’s unlimited kindness, the more we will be able to embrace and love even life’s hardships, as we will firmly believe that רַעַךְ - they, no less than our blessings and good fortune, are a critical part of our lives and of the process of becoming the great people that we are meant to become.

## **A JEW IS A JEW IS A JEW**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

There are many Jews in the world who have strayed off the path of Torah and *mitzvos*, and are totally devoid of Yiddishkeit. Many are looked upon as “self-hating” Jews and consider the religious, G-d-fearing Jews as A “burden.” The famous question is asked: How is it possible to fulfill the *mitzvah* of “loving your fellow Jew as yourself,” when one is referring to a Jew who has done him evil?

R’ Shmelke of Nikolsburg zt’l would answer this question in a brilliant manner which describes his tremendous love of all Jews. He explains that all the souls of Israel are united together as one. Sometimes it happens that a person will accidentally strike himself. If the person would then take a stick and hit his hand that had accidentally struck him, we would all look upon him as one who was mentally deficient. Why should he inflict even more pain on himself?

The same is true with regard to those “self-hating” Jews who rail against Orthodox and religious Jews. We are all one people with one unifying soul. If one part of this soul, a divergent group of people, is unfriendly or acting against the other, it is no different than the person who hurts himself with a stick. It is as if they are doing harm to themselves. Instead of being angry and feeling the need to reciprocate with the same venomous opposition against them, we should react in a calm and loving manner. We should attempt to open a dialogue with which we can show them how they are doing nothing more than hurting themselves and their children for future generations. We must make it clear to them - and ourselves in the process - that we all originate from one Source, and no force in the world can sever our bond.

## **THE TRIAL BALANCE**

### **Devash HaSadeh**

*“You shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

Rabbi Akiva said: “This is the fundamental principle of the Torah.” (Rashi)

While doing accounting, if someone wants to check whether the totals agree, a trial balance is made. Similarly, someone who wants to establish whether the Torah study in which one has engaged was truly performed in the spirit of devotion and sincerity should make a “trial balance” by assessing the amount of love one bears for other Jews.

The observance of the commandment “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” is the test that will demonstrate to him whether his study was of value, for “this is the fundamental principle of the Torah.”

## **PREPPING YOUR SPEECH**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

Speech is rooted in peace, as the verse (Tehillim 122:8) states: “I will now speak peace.” When there is strife, a person cannot speak properly - in particular, he cannot speak proper words of prayer. Therefore, Dovid HaMelech said (ibid., 120:7), “I am peace. Yet how can I speak? They are for war.”

The solution is for every person, prior to prayer, to accept upon himself the commandment to “Love your friend as yourself.” In doing so, he attains peace. His speech becomes worthy again, and he can offer proper prayer. (See Likutey Moharan I, 239)

## **AWAKENING MERCY**

### **Sassover Rebbe**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

When one is in dire straits and shows mercy, that feeling of mercy awakens mercy in the Heavens and Hashem will have mercy on him.

## **HEAVENLY ASSISTANCE**

### **Sefas Emes**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

It is not easy to carry out the commandment “and you shall love your fellow as yourself” in the fullest sense of its meaning. Therefore, immediately after this command, G-d declares: “I am Hashem” - I, G-d, stand ready to help you to fulfill My commandment provided that you sincerely wish to keep it.

## **WHAT IT’S ALL ABOUT**

### **Rabbi Dovid Feinstein**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

Rabbi Akiva taught: “Love your friend as you love yourself” - *zeh klal gadol baTorah* (this is a great principle of the Torah). (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4)

When Yidden get up after learning Torah, they should be more compassionate and kinder, with more room in their heart for others. If that doesn’t happen, then they didn’t learn it properly, and should sit back down to learn it again.

## CARING FOR OTHERS

### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

*"You shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem."*  
(19:18)

The simple understanding of this verse is that we should love our fellow Jew literally as much as we love ourselves. However, the Ramban writes that since it is not human nature to be able to love someone else to exactly the same degree, this cannot, therefore, be the correct interpretation of the verse (one the Ramban's proofs of this is based on the words of Rabbi Akiva that one's own life takes precedence over another in cases that do not involve cardinal sins; Bava Metzia 62b).

Instead, the verse is instructing us to want the best for others just as we would wish it for ourselves: Just as we only wish blessings and success for ourselves in every area of life without limitation, so too we should want this for those around us. This still is not an easy task, but the Mesillas Yesharim (Chap. 19) offers us encouragement by relating that the more we work on ourselves to love our fellow Jew, the more Hashem loves us!

Someone who was able to care for others as he cared for himself was the Brisker Rav. This was aptly demonstrated when community leaders came to the Brisker Rav's home one evening to discuss an urgent matter with him. When they arrived, they were appalled to discover that there was no form of heating, and it was unbearably cold. After leaving, the men decided to arrange for chopped wood to be delivered to the Brisker Rav every day so that his home would be warm.

The following night the men returned for further discussions, but as they walked into the home, they once again felt the bitter cold. They asked the Rebbetzin why she had not used the wood to warm their household.

"Yesterday, so many poor people came to our home" she explained, "and they all complained about the freezing cold. They had no money to buy wood so my husband allowed them to take as much as they needed from our pile, until all the wood was gone."

When the group left, they once again arranged for the wood supplier to fill up their storehouse with wood, but realizing that this would happen every day, they told the Rebbetzin the only thing they could think of to ensure that the Rav and the Rebbetzin would benefit from the wood themselves: "We are giving you this wood for your home only. If the Rav gives it to poor people instead, we will consider it theft!"

The following evening, the men returned to the Brisker Rav's residence and it was freezing once again. "Why isn't your home warm?" they questioned the Rebbetzin, "We provided the wood on condition that you don't give it away."

"I understand," answered the Rebbetzin, "but my husband and I decided that if the poor people are going to be cold, then we too can be cold!"

## LOVE AND PEACE

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem."* (19:18)

Rabbi Akiva taught: "Love your friend as you love yourself" - *zeh klal gadol baTorah* (this is a great principle of the Torah). (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4)

*Klal* (כלל, principle) is related to *Klaluyot* (כלליות, togetherness). The main means to receive the Torah is by bonding ourselves in unity. (Likutey Halakhot VI, p. 4a)

Rabbi Akiva elucidated this principle because he was a descendant of converts, who are in greater need of the rectification of *mishpat* (i.e., Torah). When Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students did not attain love for one another, they perished. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, one of Rabbi Akiva's five great disciples, rectified those students' blemish, since he and his group had great love for one another. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 112a)

At Sinai, each Jew agreed to be a guarantor for the other to serve G-d. But it is hard enough for us to fulfill our own obligations, let alone take responsibility for others.

How often do we find ourselves in the middle of our prayers without realizing where we're up to, or become so sidetracked that we forget we are wearing *talit* and *tefillin*? How can we say that we ourselves are serving G-d? The only way we can fulfill our obligations is with *ratzon* (desire). When we have a deep, burning *ratzon* to serve G-d, we are given the ability to do so.

We can arouse that *ratzon* through loving other Jews. The act of uniting with others arouses Divine Favor (also called *Ratzon*), paralleling our own *ratzon* to serve G-d. By loving other Jews and drawing the desire to serve G-d, we can eventually succeed in performing the *mitzvos* correctly. (Likutey Halakhot VI, p. 240-242)

One should accept this *mitzvah* upon himself before praying. (Shaar HaKavanot, Inyan Birkhot HaShachar, p. 2)

All types of speech are associated with peace, including our prayers. If there is no peace and love between people, they cannot pray properly. Thus, a synagogue is called a *beit Knesset* (בית כנסת), from the word *Kinus* (כינוס, gathering), since it brings people together and unifies them with a common purpose. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 462)

The Torah lists this *mitzvah* after many other commandments instructing us to be careful with other people's property and possessions. The love of one Jew towards another is exemplified by how one conducts himself; behaving morally, acting without jealousy, and so on. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 138b-139a)

## **GREATNESS OF LOVE**

### **Apter Rav**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

One might fool himself into thinking that he has reached great heights when in reality he is not even on the first rung.

If one wishes to know on which level he is, he can measure it by his love of the Jewish people. This can be accomplished by his fulfilling the command of “Love your fellow as yourself.”

This is because love of Hashem and love of the Jewish people are the same. It is impossible to reach any level of loving Hashem if one does not love His people.

## **OPEN AND HONEST**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

Parashas Kedoshim includes the famous *mitzvah* to “love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18). Rabbi Akiva exclaimed that this is a great principle of the Torah, but what does it really mean, and is it really possible to love someone as yourself?

Rabbi David Forman explores the context of this commandment and provides practical insight. The commandment begins in the *pasuk* before, when we are instructed to (1) not hate your brother in your heart, (2) admonish your fellow, (3) not take revenge or hold a grudge, and finally, (4) love your neighbor as yourself. There is clearly a process that ends in love, and it ironically begins with hate. If someone does something wrong, the Torah is saying that it’s OK to hate the action, but it’s not appropriate to keep that hate in your heart. Rather, you should privately tell them about it and communicate for their sake as well as yours so that way you won’t hold a grudge or end up doing something to retaliate. Being open and honest with those around us in a constructive way will allow us to, at worst, understand them and, at best, love and respect them.

## **DON’T SHOOT THE MESSENGER**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

The *mitzvah* against taking revenge seems impossibly hard. After all, how are we expected to forget the pain, suffering, or embarrassment that someone else caused us and not want to retaliate in some way?

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A “cease-fire relationship” is insufficient. One must nurture actual and true love between himself and others. This especially applies to Torah scholars. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 386)

Moreover, to avoid strife, we must always remember that people think and act differently, yet we must judge them favorably and think of them as being sincere in their efforts and devotions. Despite their seeming zealousness, other people are entitled to their thoughts and opinions. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 348)

## **THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING MITZVAH**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*“You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” (19:18)*

In the Gemara (Shabbos 31a), Hillel declared that the all-encompassing rule of the Torah is, “What you hate for yourself, do not do to your friend; the rest is elucidation.” The Maharsha cites the source for Hillel’s teaching as being the verse “And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.”

From the simple understanding of the verse, it is clear how this commandment governs interpersonal relationships between man and his fellow. However, if this is to be the “all-encompassing rule of the Torah” we need to understand, how does it also incorporate the *Mitzvos* between man and Hashem?

To answer this question, the Kli Yakar points out that Hillel’s all-encompassing rule of the Torah includes the final three words of the verse “I am Hashem.” Accordingly, the first part of the verse, “And you shall love your fellow as yourself” contains all of the *Mitzvos* between man and his fellow, and the final words of the verse, “I am Hashem” contain all of the *Mitzvos* between man and Hashem.

Rav Yossi Muller, however, suggested that even the *Mitzvos* between man and Hashem are found in the words “And you shall love your fellow as yourself.” This is because the performance of interpersonal *Mitzvos*, which calls for such careful consideration of the feelings of another human being, trains us to focus on the needs of others, and through developing this sensitivity, we become able to put aside our own personal needs for the sake of developing a relationship with Hashem through His *Mitzvos*.

Alternatively, Rav Zecharia Wallerstein suggests that loving a fellow human, who was created “in the image of Hashem” (Bereishis 1:27) enables us to grasp to some degree what it means to “love” Hashem, thereby forming the starting point towards the fulfillment of the *Mitzvos* between man and Hashem. (Rabbi Yonasan Boruch Caller)

(Making the *mitzvah* all the more hard, the Ramchal writes that that taking revenge is a taste sweeter than honey and refraining from doing so is something that only angels would find easy; Mesillas Yesharim, Chap. 11).

The answer, according to the Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 241), is to reassess our viewpoint. For when we think that someone else wronged us, we are denying a fundamental principle of Torah - that nothing can happen to us without it being directly decreed from Hashem. If so, the other person was not guilty of harming us; really, it was our own misdeeds which warranted us to suffer. As such, we only have ourselves to blame! And while it is true that the other person misused his free will and will certainly be held accountable for his actions, the harm that we suffered is completely separate from his efforts to harm us.

As such, the Torah instructs us not to take revenge because doing so would show a severe lack of recognition that Hashem is in full control of everything that happens to us. It would also not at all address the true cause of our suffering.

The following incredible story related by Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein demonstrates how even the most harmful intent can lead to celebration if this is what Hashem wants:

Shimon sought revenge against his "friend" Reuven, whom he felt had wronged him in some way. With a huge smile, he approached Reuven and told him that he had exciting news - there was a perfect girl who had already agreed to go out with him that very night. Details were quickly provided, and Reuven could not believe his good fortune after hearing the qualities of this girl. He excitedly rushed home to get ready and within a short time found himself at his date's door. Dressed in his finest suit he knocked on the door. An older man answered and quizzically looked at the young man standing before him. "Can I help you?"

Taken aback, Reuven stammered, "Erm. I'm supposed to be meeting your daughter tonight. My friend Shimon arranged that I come at this time," he said, realizing that there was, in fact, no date arranged.

Feeling sorry for Reuven, the man invited him inside where they sat down, and despite the awkward circumstances had a very enjoyable discussion. It was during their conversation that the man realized that Reuven would indeed make a suitable match for his daughter. Shortly afterward the couple met, and after just a few more meetings, became engaged!

(The story reached Rav Zilberstein because Shimon had the audacity to demand a *shadchanas* fee when he heard of their engagement. The question was presented to Rav Chaim Kanievsky, who ruled that since Shimon had no intention to help either side, he was not entitled to any money. For it was clear that Shimon did not "make" the match, it was all Hashem!)

## **YOUR BEST FRIEND**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*"You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people. And you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem."* (19:18)

The final words of this verse seem out of place. Why is the *Mitzvah* of loving one's fellow Jew followed by the words "I am Hashem"?

Rav Noach Weinberg would often relate the following story that answers this question beautifully.

Once, there were two best friends - one from Syria and the other from Rome. They were also business partners and often travelled to each other's country. One day, as the Roman Jew arrived at the Syrian port, he was promptly arrested and charged with being a Roman spy. Without a genuine trial, the Roman Jew was sentenced to be hanged the following morning.

"Wait," he begged, "please allow me to return to my family in order to say goodbye and to tie up all of my affairs so that they be financially supported once I am gone."

The judge laughed and shouted back, "And you would return here to be hanged, would you?!"

"I will give you a guarantor. You see, I have a best friend here in Syria," said the Roman Jew, "and I am sure that he will sit in my place until I return." The judge did not know what to say and decided to summon the Syrian friend and bring the matter before the Emperor. The Syrian friend eagerly agreed to the deal and because the Emperor was so intrigued, he permitted the Roman Jew to go home and then return to Syria. "But one word of warning," the Emperor concluded, "if you are not back here in sixty days, then your friend will be hanged instead of you!" With a warm embrace, the two friends went their separate ways - the Roman Jew rushed over to the port and the Syrian Jew was led to jail.

Leaving his family for the last time, the Roman Jew returned to the Roman port to wait for a boat back to Syria. Finally he found one and waited for the wind to pick up enough strength to embark on their voyage. Several days went by and the weather had not improved, and the Roman Jew was getting very nervous. Eventually a sufficient wind came and they were able to set sail. As the boat docked on Syrian shores the first off was the Roman Jew. This was the day that he was destined to be hanged and he needed to reach the town square before noon. As he raced towards the square, he witnessed his friend being dragged towards the gallows. "Stop! Stop!" he shouted as he pushed to the front of the crowd, "I am the one you want" he said as he mounted the platform. "Release this man!"

"No! Don't do it," came the Syrian Jew's surprising reply, "we had a deal. If you are not here in sixty days, then I take your place. You are late!"

In front of everyone present, the two friends, with tears in their eyes, tried to persuade each other to spare himself from the hangman's noose.

The guards reported back to the Emperor who was eagerly waiting the day of the hanging to see what would occur. The two friends stood before the Emperor and pleaded their case.

"We had a deal," said the Syrian.

"It was not my fault... The winds were bad," said the Roman.

"This is what was agreed," his friend said back to him.

The Emperor cut them both off and said: "Now listen to me. I will let you both go free on one condition... you make me the third friend!"

With this story, Rav Noach demonstrates that when we act with each other in a loving way, willing to make sacrifices and put others' interests on the same level as ours (this is the meaning of the *Mitzvah* to love one's fellow Jew; Rambam, Hilchos Deos 6:3), Hashem sees this and wants to be a part of that relationship... and who better to have as a best friend?

## **FREE OF ARROGANCE**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"When you shall come to the Land and you shall plant any food tree, you shall treat its fruit as orlah; for three years it shall be orlah to you, they shall not be eaten." (19:23)*

Adam! Who will remove the earth from your eyes? Your descendants will wait three years until they can eat the fruits of their newly planted trees. Yet you could not wait even an hour! (Bereishis Rabbah 21:7)

The Midrash teaches that Adam's eating from the Tree of Knowledge parallels the eating of the forbidden fruit of Orlah. Both of these sins represent haughtiness and lead a person away from G-d. Indeed, Adam's sin was considered an act of arrogance and led to his death. Anything termed Orlah (including the foreskin, which is also called Orlah) is extraneous to the object, just as haughtiness represents an attitude of superiority over others. One must always strive for humility in his behavior and his eating, for humility leads to repentance and to life. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 318)

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The three years during which the fruits are forbidden represent the three major lusts: avarice, gluttony and immorality. By refraining from eating the fruit for three years, we break the evil inclination of these lusts.

In the fourth year, we bring the fruits to Yerushalayim (ירושלים, Jerusalem), which signifies *Yirah Shalem* (יראה שלם, perfected fear). One who breaks the three lusts merits to fear of G-d. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 328)

## **PAYING IT FORWARD**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"When you shall come to the Land and you shall plant any food tree, you shall treat its fruit as orlah; for three years it shall be orlah to you, they shall not be eaten." (19:23)*

Parshiyos Acharei Mos and Kedoshim discuss many rules involving morality, justice, and empathy. Nestled in the middle of Parashas Kedoshim are the instructions to plant fruit trees and not enjoy their fruits until the fourth year (19:23).

Why did the Torah insert this law right between laws about kindness?

While most may focus on the rules regarding the tree's fruits, Rabbi Henschel Leibowitz points to the commandment of planting the tree itself as an opportunity for growth. By planting fruit trees, we are considering the future and planning for it. Not only that, but the fact that we're paying it forward also reflects our recognition for all the kindness shown by those who came before us.

While the various commandments are meant to inspire within us a sense of morality, justice, and empathy, the placement of this commandment is meant to allow us to recognize those who have performed kindness for us and to compel us to relay those values forward.

## **TRUST THE PROCESS**

### **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

*"When you shall come to the Land and you shall plant any food tree, you shall treat its fruit as orlah; for three years it shall be orlah to you, they shall not be eaten." (19:23)*

This *mitzvah* defies rationalization, as the Torah commands us to destroy the fruit produced during the first three years of a tree's growth. This is diametrically opposed to the prohibition issued by the Torah against wanton destruction, especially of fruit trees, even though one may have many such trees, whose fruit he does not need. Here, however, the Torah decreed that we destroy these fruits by burning them.

The Torah (v. 25) adds that in the fifth year you may eat the fruit: להוסיף לכם תבואתו, "so that it will increase its crop for you." Thus, it is clear that Hashem wishes that there should be an abundance of fruit especially for those who fear Him, but, nevertheless, the first three years of fruit produce must be destroyed. This is meant to teach us obedience to Hashem's will even if we do not understand the wisdom of His decree.

Perhaps this schedule is symbolic of the various stages of education, viz. that when a child reaches his fourth year, he is taught the letters of the *alef beis* and the vowel signs, and when he reaches his fifth year, he is to be taught as much as he is able to absorb (Rav, Avos 5:21).

## **BEARING SPIRITUAL FRUIT**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“When you shall come to the Land and you shall plant any food tree, you shall treat its fruit as orlah; for three years it shall be orlah to you, they shall not be eaten.” (19:23)*

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 25:3) notes that G-d’s first act after creating the world was to plant the Garden of Eden (see Bereishis 2:8), and that this verse implies that the same is expected of the Jewish people. Upon arriving in the Land of Israel, agricultural planting was to be their first endeavor.

The importance given to planting stresses the central position of cultivation both in civilization in general and in one’s personal, spiritual life. Just as trees and plants constantly bear fruit, so too, we must fulfill our Divine mission in a manner that “bears fruit” - i.e., that affects ourselves and others in a lasting and meaningful way. (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 22, p. 378) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **HOLY MUNDANITY**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“For three years it shall be orlah to you, they shall not be eaten... In order to increase its crop for you – I am Hashem, your G-d.” (19:23-25)*

Surprisingly, G-d tells us that the purpose of observing these restrictions on eating the fruit from a tree during its first four years is for the sake of the fifth year and beyond. Shouldn’t the focus of this process be the holiness of the fourth year, rather than the mundaneness of the fifth year and beyond?

The answer is that holiness per se is not the goal of life; the goal is to fill the mundane with holiness, for only thus can we make all facets of life into G-d’s home, thereby fulfilling the purpose of creation. When we take the fruit of the fifth and following years, which is not intrinsically holy, and make use of it for holy purposes, we are accomplishing precisely that. This is especially true when we recognize that the bountiful blessings of the fifth year come to us as a direct result of our having heeded G-d’s instructions regarding the fruit of the preceding four years. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 134-138) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*“You shall not eat blood....” (19:26)*

Do not eat before you pray for your blood (i.e., your life). (Berakhot 10b)

That is, before you eat, you should pray for your soul, which is in the blood. One must rectify and satiate his soul with prayer prior to satiating his body with food. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 90)

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Do not eat before you pray for your blood. (Berakhot 10b)

Kabbalistically, blood represents judgments. G-d created the world with chesed (kindness), the vehicle through which He feeds and sustains His creation, as in “He gives food to all flesh, for His chesed is forever” (Tehillim 136:25), and “He Who sustains the entire world with His goodness, with grace, with chesed and with compassion” (Grace After Meals).

When a person prays to G-d prior to eating, he displays his acceptance of G-d as his Source of sustenance. But when he eats before praying, he implies that his food is his by right rather than as a gift, and then he arouses judgments and suffering. Such eating leads to arrogance: “Lest you eat and be satiated... and your heart will become haughty, and you will forget G-d” (Devarim 8:12, 14). (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 172a)

## **FATE VS FAITH**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*“You shall not eat blood; you shall not practice divination and you shall not believe in lucky times.” (19:26)*

*Shanah* (שנה, year) is similar to *Shinui* (שנוי, change). Each year is different - no two years are the same, nor two months, two weeks, or even two days. Those who believe in omens and astrological signs reject Divine Providence in favor of a natural order, contending that their knowledge can predict or suppose the future.

Not so one who believes that G-d directs the world. In the mind of the believer, all the differences in times and seasons are due solely to G-d’s Providence. Such a person is not dependent on any astronomical or astrological sequences to determine his future, but on G-d alone. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 210a)

## **ACT FAST**

### **Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman**

*“You shall rise in the presence of old age and honor the face of the elder. And you shall have fear of your G-d – I am Hashem.” (19:32)*

Before old age befalls you, rise up and act to improve your soul.

## **ACQUIRING WISDOM**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“You shall honor the face of the elder...” (19:32)*

*Zakein* (זקן, elder) may be read as a contraction of the phrase *zeh kanah chokhmah* (זה קנה חכמה, this one has acquired wisdom). (Kiddushin 32b)

This means that we must accord respect to the wise. Alternatively, it means that a person must continuously increase his own wisdom. (See Likutey Moharan II, 4:8)

## COMPASSION TOWARDS COMPASSION

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*“You shall rise in the presence of old age and honor the face of the elder. And you shall have fear of your G-d – I am Hashem.” (19:32)*

The main form of fear of G-d is awe of His grandeur - because He is the Master and Ruler, the root and source of all the worlds, before Whom all are considered as nothing (Zohar 1:11b). When a person achieves this level, he is referred to as a “beloved son” to the Omnipresent.

Now, a precious son who is loved with a great and everlasting love by his Heavenly Father is extremely frightened to disobey his Father’s will, G-d forbid, since he does not want his greatly beloved Father to be distressed, G-d forbid. The son’s whole aspiration is to bring satisfaction to his Father in Heaven, as our Sages (Zohar 3:7b) say, “The Jewish people sustain their Father in Heaven” through the study of Torah, prayer, acts of loving-kindness, and the observance of *mitzvos*.

But if, G-d forbid, the reverse is true, then our Sages (Chagigah 15b; Sanhedrin 46a) say, “When a man suffers on account of having sinned, the Shechinah moans: ‘My head is heavy, My arm is heavy.’” This indicates that G-d is pained, as it were, when man does not comply with His will. The righteous are always afraid to cause pain to their Father in Heaven, G-d forbid, and instead intend only to give Him satisfaction. Thus, this type of fear is actually a fear of G-d’s trait of compassion, unlike the fear of those who are afraid of G-d’s trait of judgment, G-d forbid. Rather, the level mentioned above describes a *tzaddik* who is afraid of G-d’s trait of compassion - that is, not to cause pain to His attribute of mercy. For the main reason that the world was created by G-d was in order to benefit created beings, as is known (Eitz Chaim, Shaar HaKlalim 1).

Furthermore, “More than the calf wants to suckle the cow wants to give milk” (Pesachim 112a). G-d’s main intent was to bestow kindness and abundant goodness upon the Jewish people. If, G-d forbid, they do not perform G-d’s will, then the Shechinah utters the expression “My head is heavy...”

It turns out, then, that the main fear of the *tzaddik* is that he does not bring pain to G-d’s attribute of mercy, but instead allow G-d to bestow kindness, compassion, life, and peace upon the Jewish people. For this gives G-d His main pleasure.

As is known, the venerable and the elderly symbolize the trait of compassion, as our Sages (Mechilta, Yisro 5) taught: “At Har Sinai, G-d appeared to the Jewish people as an elderly man, full of compassion.” This, then, is the interpretation of the phrase “You shall rise in the presence of an old person” - you shall spiritually rise and thereby attain the ideal form of the fear of G-d, which is to fear bringing pain to “the old person,” i.e., G-d’s trait of compassion.

The verse concludes, “And you shall honor the presence of a sage” - so that the Shechinah should not say, G-d forbid, “My head is heavy...” but rather, “there is beauty and majesty (הדר) before Him; might and joy in His place” (I Divrei HaYamim 16:27).

This is the deeper meaning of the phrase “and you shall honor (והדרת) the presence of a sage.”

## YOUTHFUL CONFIDENCE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“You shall rise in the presence of old age and honor the face of the elder. And you shall have fear of your G-d – I am Hashem.” (19:32)*

In general, it is best that we pursue spiritual growth gradually, not venturing a new step until we have found our footing on the previous step.

At the same time, however, the fact that G-d is infinite means that spiritual growth must reflect G-d’s infinity - that is, it must involve quantum leaps to levels of Divine consciousness that are infinitely higher than our present level.

True, from our present perspective, it might seem naive to think that we can attain and maintain an infinitely higher level of spiritual consciousness. But this belief is not only not naive - since we indeed possess infinite spiritual potential thanks to our inner, Divine soul - it is what keeps us young and idealistic.

This is the allegorical meaning of the phrase, “You must rise before an elderly person.” The Zohar (3:227b, 87b) interprets this phrase in accordance with its literal meaning, “Before old age, you must arise”: Before you succumb to “thinking old” - the attitude that you cannot remake yourself on a higher level - arise, i.e., habituate yourself to “thinking young” - the attitude that you can indeed ascend to infinitely higher levels of Divine consciousness. (Hitva’aduyot 5714, vol. 2, pp. 245-248) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## WEATHERING THE STORM

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“You shall rise in the presence of old age and honor the face of the elder. And you shall have fear of your G-d – I am Hashem.” (19:32)*

Rabbi Yochanan would stand up before an elderly man even if the man wasn’t a Jew. When asked [if this was Torah law], he answered, “How much suffering has this person seen in his lifetime?!” (Kiddushin 33a)

This is the way of the world, especially for those seeking G-d: Every person faces different challenges and tests. One must learn to be flexible in order to weather the challenges. (Likutey Halachot III, p. 161a)

## **TORAH FOR ALL**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*“The convert who dwells with you should be like one who is native-born among you. Love him as yourself, for you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt – I am Hashem, your G-d.” (19:34)*

The Torah was given to all, no matter what level they are on. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 134a)

## **APPRECIATE THEIR STRUGGLE**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“The convert who stays with you should be like one who is native-born among you. Love him as yourself, for you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.” (19:34)*

The Torah instructs us to “love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18), and then several *pesukim* later, in its discussion of strangers, specifies to love him (convert) as yourself (19:34). What does the Torah accomplish by singling out converts? It is ostensibly the same requirement.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky suggests that there is an added obligation specific to converts. While loving your neighbor is an inherent obligation, loving a convert is a moral obligation. The difference is subtle but significant in that it accounts for an appreciation for others’ struggles. The message inherent in this added edict is to not only accept others for who they are and where they are on their journey of improvement but also be mindful of what it must have taken for them to get there.

## **KEEP IT HONEST**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“You must possess [only] accurate scales, weights, and measures – I am Hashem, your G-d, Who brought you forth from the land of Egypt...” (19:36)*

The Torah prohibits us from possessing false measures even if we never use them. This is because false measures involve not only theft but deception: the merchant pretends to charge his customer correctly, but is really cheating him. This trickery ultimately leads to overt theft and worse.

The same applies with regard to our relationship with G-d. Our evil inclination, aware that any attempt to convince us to openly rebel against our Creator will undoubtedly fail, attempts to ensnare us through deception. “I agree,” he begins, “that our every action must be measured, carried out in full compliance with Jewish law. But what would be so terrible if the ‘measures’ were slightly off? Even if you do insist on keeping an honest measure,” he continues, “keep another one as well: Apply G-d’s laws to your life fully when dealing with spiritual matters. But when interacting with the material world or conducting business, surely there is room for compromise.”

Scrupulousness in maintaining accurate measures, as well as in all business dealings, is the prerequisite to fulfilling the entire Torah. In the words of the great Talmudic sage Hillel, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow - this is the entire Torah, and the rest is commentary. Go and study it!” (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, pp. 149-157) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **INFUSING DIVINITY**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“You must sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am Hashem, your G-d.” (20:7)*

According to many authorities (Sefer Chareidim, Mitzvot Asei min HaTorah 7:13, citing the Ramban, Rabbi Saadia Gaon, and Rabbi Shelomo ibn Gabirol; Tanya, chapters 27 (34b) and 30 (39a)), this verse enjoins us to sanctify ourselves not only through inherently holy pursuits, but through any pursuit that is permitted to us (see Rashi on Devarim 14:21). This means that we must endeavor to remain conscious of G-d even when we are involved in what would otherwise be everyday, mundane activities.

This is important because the inherently holy acts of studying the Torah and fulfilling G-d’s explicit active and passive commandments are not enough to hasten the advent of the Messianic Redemption. The Redemption will signify a quantum leap in the revelation of Divinity - both within our own consciousness and in the world in general. In order to elicit such a sublime revelation, we need to go beyond our normal, “contractual” commitment to G-d that is defined by what He explicitly requires of us. We must infuse Divine consciousness even where it is not “normally” found - in the mundane.

One of the messages in this verse is that we must make our meals holy (Berachos 53b). This means first that we should eat with proper intentions and manners, i.e., in order to have the energy to fulfill our Divine mission and with appreciation for G-d’s benevolence in providing for our sustenance. Secondly, we should make our meals into acts of charity by inviting guests and poor people to eat with us. Finally, we should discuss the Torah at the table. If we sanctify our meals in these ways, we are told that our table acts like the Altar in the Temple, atoning for us and enabling us to achieve higher levels of Divine consciousness (Berachos 55a).

The reason our sanctified table functions like the Altar is because both serve as means through which the sparks of Divinity embedded in the physical world are elevated. When an animal is sacrificed on the Altar, the entire animal kingdom is elevated; when grain, wine, or oil is sacrificed on the Altar, the entire vegetable kingdom is elevated. Similarly, when we consume food and drink with holy intentions and in a holy way, all aspects of our lives and of the world are elevated. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **MAINTAINING HOLINESS**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"You must sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am Hashem, your G-d." (20:7)*

"Sanctify yourselves" means to take the initiative and work to become holy. Afterwards, "be holy" - strengthen yourself to maintain your level of holiness. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 69a)

## **GENERATING HOLINESS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"You must sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am Hashem, your G-d." (20:7)*

The Talmudic sages assure us that when we sanctify ourselves even in some small way, G-d helps us become holy in a great way. When we resist the urge to indulge in some material pleasure, we generate an increase of holiness and of positive spiritual energy, which then descends and rests upon us.

This verse, then, can be interpreted as follows: "Sanctify yourself", i.e., act in some holy way, even if such behavior seems to be beyond your present spiritual level, and you will "be holy" - ultimately you will attain that level of holiness, on account of the great holy energy that you have generated, which will then descend upon you. (Tanya, end of chapter 27) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **PROPER PERSPECTIVE**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"A man who shall take his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother, and he shall see her nakedness and she shall see his nakedness, it is a disgrace and they shall be cut off in the sight of the members of their people; he will have uncovered the nakedness of his sister, he shall bear his iniquity." (20:17)*

The Torah describes forbidden relations with the Hebrew word "*chessed*" (translated as kindness), which Rashi explains is also the Aramaic word for disgraceful (20:17). Why does the Torah deviate to Aramaic when describing illicit relationships and use a word that has an opposite meaning in Hebrew?

Rav Yochanan Zweig explains that Aramaic is a language of perspective and that both languages' translations of the word *chessed* describe the acts of giving and receiving, but from opposite perspectives. While the giver may feel like they are being kind, the receiver may feel shame for relying on others. This sensitivity to others' perspectives especially applies to relationships, which is perhaps why the variance is utilized here. It can sometimes feel like in relationships we speak different languages, but understanding the other perspective is the first step in strengthening each other.

## **LOVE OVER LOGIC**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"A man who shall take his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother..." (20:17)*

If G-d considers incest so disgraceful, why did he allow Adam and Chava's sons and daughters to marry each other? The answer, say the sages (Sanhedrin 58b), is that since these brothers and sisters had no one else to marry, G-d in His kindness made an exception to the rule in order to enable the human race to survive.

Similarly, in the Song of Songs, G-d addresses the Jewish people as, "My sister, My bride" (Shir HaShirim 4:9, 10, 12; See Zohar 3:7b) in order to make the same point. We join with G-d in "marital union" by studying the Torah, performing His commandments, and reaching out to Him in prayer. Our mutual "offspring" are the positive effects - on ourselves and on the world - that result from these holy acts.

But since G-d is infinitely beyond us, logically He should hardly even notice us. How can such insignificant creatures as ourselves propagate Divine consciousness throughout the world - let alone have the power to transform reality, making the world into G-d's true home?

The answer is that just as the union of the world's first siblings was made possible only through G-d's kindness, it is similarly only on account of G-d's kindness that our union with Him can bear fruit. Our efforts are indeed important and effective, but we must always remember that it is G-d who makes them so. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5714-5716, pp. 549-550) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **INTEGRAL INTEGRITY**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"You shall distinguish between the pure animal and the impure..." (20:25)*

The Torah tells us to distinguish between *tahor* (pure) and *tamei* (impure) animals (20:25). Rashi explains that this differentiation isn't between a clean animal like a cow and an unclean donkey because that would be unmistakable, but between a kosher cow (appropriately processed) and a non-kosher cow (processed improperly). What is the Torah adding by requiring us to distinguish between kosher and non-kosher animals, and what is Rashi highlighting in his clarification?

Rav Moshe Feinstein points out that the difference between a kosher cow and a non-kosher cow is dictated by the Oral Law, and he suggests that the Torah is imploring us to be scrupulous in our observance of the Oral Torah just as we are in the Written Torah.

Another factor that this *mitzvah* can be highlighting is that although no one will know if the animal was processed correctly, we must act with integrity to ensure that we act properly. Acting with integrity, especially when no one will know the difference, makes all the difference.

## **ENJOYING THE PERMITTED**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“You shall distinguish between the pure animal and the impure, and between the pure bird and the impure; and you shall not render your souls abominable through such animals and birds, and through anything that creeps on the ground, which I have set apart for you to render impure.” (20:25)*

In other words, G-d wants us to be proficient in recognizing the often fine line between proper and improper ritual slaughter.

Many of the Torah’s laws governing our actions are complex, and it is therefore sometimes tempting to play it safe by acting stringently. Taking this easier path avoids having to determine conclusively whether or not a particular case or situation is permitted according to Jewish law.

There are two reasons why we should not get into this habit:

Firstly, G-d Himself enjoins us not to deny ourselves things that He does not expressly prohibit (Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:1; Mishneh Torah, Dei’ot 3:1). This is not because G-d is anxious for us to indulge ourselves in the world’s pleasures, but because by permitting them to us, He wants us to refine and elevate both ourselves and them by using them to enhance Divine consciousness in the world.

Secondly, these laws are part and parcel of G-d’s wisdom, which He has shared with us in the Torah. Therefore, G-d wants us to study these cases (and even cases that will never apply to us personally) simply in order to imbibe His wisdom, thereby sharing in His vision of how He wishes His world to be run. (Hitva’aduyot 5747, vol. 4, pp. 352-353) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

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