



your brother; your companion; your fellow men... and the culmination “love the other as you love yourself.” This list shows without doubt that the theme of the chapter is inclusivity and friendship, rather than the creation of a holy, elitist religious group.

In light of that, I would like to suggest a different interpretation of *שקדו*, one which is in line with its original Hebrew context – unique. Verse 19:2 will be translated thus:

*Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel and tell them: you shall be unique, for I, God, am unique!*

Already the early sages of the Mishnah emphasized the idea of the individual’s uniqueness. Talmud Yerushalmi (Berakhot 9:1) mentions a special blessing recited upon seeing a great multitude:

ברוך חכם הרזים כשם שאין פרצופיהן דומין זה לזה כך אין דעתן דומה זה לזה

- blessed is the Master of Secrets [who created so many people], each with a unique face, each with a unique personality. This blessing, as other statements in Rabbinical literature, rely on the beautiful concept, found in the first chapter of the Torah, that humans were created in the image of God.

Throughout human history, the uniqueness of the individual was challenged and suppressed by monarchs, tyrants, and totalitarian regimes. Today, we would like to think that, at least in developed countries, such oppression is limited to religious movements which indoctrinate their followers into a thoughtless adherence of clear-cut ideology. But Yuval Noah Harari, in his book *Homo Deus*, argues for a new understanding of mankind, one which makes us nothing more than a random collection of wires, neurons, and chemical reactions. Our experiences, claims Harari, a professor of history at Hebrew University, are all subjective, and there is no objective entity or personality which could be described as human. Harari predicts, in a sense, the end of humanity as we know it, and its replacement by improved robo-humans. His scientific-philosophical treatise, which has become a bestseller, is nothing less than a new way to oppress human creativity and individuality by making them insignificant.

The Torah guides us not to be swayed by ancient or modern ideologues. Each individual is, as the word indicates, indivisible and unique. This understanding leads to an appreciation of one’s own talents and gifts, and to the nurturing of self-esteem and a sense of purpose and fulfilment. It is then extended towards the rest of humanity, as we realize that all others are unique as well. In that spirit, chapter 19 of Leviticus teaches us to respect the boundaries of others, whether emotional, physical, or financial.

Shabbat Shalom

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