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Parshat Kedoshim

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SWEET REVENGE

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

A verse in his week's portion reminds me of a terse retort that American politician, Senator Henry Clay, made to his antagonist, Virginia's John Randolph, right before their infamous duel in April of 1826. The two were walking toward each other on a narrow footpath, with little room to pass. One would have to give way. "I never make room for scoundrels," sneered Randolph. "I always do," Clay smiled as he stepped off the paved path to let Randolph pass.

In commanding us not to revenge nor bear grudges, the Torah alludes to two distinct character flaws.

"You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself — I am Hashem" (Leviticus 19:18).

What does the Torah mean, "You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge," what is the difference?

Rashi explains: If Joe says to David "Lend me your sickle", and David replies, "No!", and the next day David says to Joe, "Lend me your hatchet", and Joe retorts, "I am not going to lend it to you, just as you refused to lend me your sickle" – this is avenging; and what is "bearing a grudge"? Rashi continues. "If Joe says to David, "Lend me your hatchet", and David replies "No!" and on the next day David says to Joe "Lend me your sickle", and Joe replies "Here it is; I am not like you, because you would not lend me" – this is called "bearing a grudge" because he retains enmity in his heart although he does not actually avenge himself." In both cases, the avenger and the grudge bearer have committed a sin. They have transgressed a negative commandment of the Torah.

But what about the initial denial of the loan? What is the punishment for the men who initially refused to lend their sickles or hatchets? Neither punishment, nor even a warning is issued to them. Why is the grudgingly generous man treated worse than the outright denier of kindness and sharing?

A famous tale that circulates among disparate fund-raisers, goes as follows: The Rabbi came to the millionaire in search of a contribution for his Yeshiva. The man took him in warmly, but after the rabbi made his pitch, the man began a semi-tirade. "Do you know that I have a brother that is in a wheelchair? His five children have no means of support!" The rabbi shook his head, apologetically. "And," continued the magnate, "Did you know that I have a nephew with 12 children in Israel? The rabbi began to stammer; he was unaware of all these obligations. The rich man cut him short. My mother is still alive in a nursing home that charges 1200 dollars a week! And my sister's home just burnt down and they have no place to live!" The rabbi began backing away sure that there was surely no funds left for his's Yeshiva, but the broad grin on the man's face stopped him. "And, Rabbi," continued the mogul, "I don't give a penny for any one of them, so why in the world should I give something to you?"

The Chofetz Chaim explains: The Torah's objective in this mitzvah is to train us not to be hateful or spiteful. Cheap is cheap. And it's tough to do something about that. It is a character flaw, but it is not hatred. Some of the nicest most warm, friendly even loving people do not like to give or lend. They will offer you their ear, their home and their time. They just will not give something that they physically possess. The Torah, does not deal with them the same way as the person who would be generous, but for the animus in his heart, or the one who does give, but, his openhandedness is shrouded snide remarks, and a harbor of hate. That overbearing enmity, despite his tainted giving is worthy of a Torah transgression.

Though the Torah tries to get us to control our emotional responses, it is more important for us to be kind, loving, and compassionate than generous with a hateful heart.

Holy Kitchen, Holy Sidewalk, Holy Workplace

By Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha of Kedoshim deals with a myriad of topics, all of which bear relevance to the central topic of the parsha – kedoshim tihiyu – “you shall be holy and sanctified, dedicated to God's service.” The parsha deals with intimate matters, marriage, home and family. It deals with monetary matters, commerce and business. It deals with interpersonal behavior and challenges, with getting along with others and not taking advantage of the “blindness,” handicaps and mistakes of others. It deals with purely ritual matters, with laws of sacrifices and tithes and offerings in the Temple. It is one of the most all-encompassing parshiyot of the entire Torah, leaving almost no area of human experience and Torah ritual observance untouched. So, at first glance, it looks like a hodge-podge of different rules all thrown together, formless and disorganized, unconnected and even unfocused. But that is far from being the truth of the matter. For the Torah here emphasizes the essential wholeness and unity of the Jewish concept of the service of God and of human dedication and holiness.

The home, the marketplace, the Temple, the dinner table and the kitchen are all the places of holiness. One who restricts “holiness” to specified places of holiness alone, does the Jewish concept of holiness a great disservice. The synagogue and the house of Torah study are special places of holiness but they are not the only exclusive places. Holiness exists wherever Jews apply the holy practices of the Torah in their everyday lives. It is never limited by space, time or circumstance.

This fundamental lesson that emphasizes the omnipresence and universality of the Jewish concept of holiness needs to be repeatedly emphasized in our personal and national lives. One of the great goals of both the Chasidic and Mussar movements, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, was to spread the idea of Torah holiness into every aspect of human life and behavior. In Judaism, it is unthinkable to be a pious person in the synagogue or study hall and a reprehensible person in commercial or interpersonal relationships. I believe that this tawdry situation is included in the famous statement of the Ramban in his commentary to the parsha of Kedoshim that one can be an “obscene person within the confines of Torah.” Anyone who limits Torah holiness to matters of ritual, to the places of the synagogue and the study hall exclusively, enters that obscene, treacherous realm.

The Torah does not grant us the luxury of compartmentalizing our lives and our striving for holiness. If schizophrenia is a mental and emotional disease in psychiatric terms, then this is the spiritual version of that same type of disease. The Haskala in the nineteenth century proclaimed that it could produce someone who would be a “Jew in his home and a cosmopolitan human being, a citizen of the world in the marketplace.” The events of the past century have proven that this schizophrenic dream is untenable. Only the whole, holy Jew, who practices holiness everywhere in life and in society can aspire to fulfill the Godly challenge of kedoshim tihiyu – “you shall be sanctified and dedicated unto God's service.”

A Haunting Thought About Jumping To Conclusions

By Rabbi Yisrocher Frand

This week's Parsha contains a positive Biblical commandment, which we often do not think about as such.

The Talmud [Shavuot 30a] gives two different interpretations of the verse [pasuk], “With Justice you shall judge your fellow man” [Vayikra 19:15]. According to one opinion, this verse is giving direction to Judges. When a person comes to a Din Torah [Judgment in a civil case according to Torah law] the judge must treat the litigants equally. He is not allowed to have one litigant stand and the other one sit, one speak at length and the other urged to speak briefly, and so forth. However, according to a second interpretation in the Gemara, the verse is directed at every Jew. Its intent is that we must judge our fellow man favorably, always giving him the benefit of the doubt.

In other words, “Give your friend the benefit of the doubt” is not “merely” a teaching from Ethics of the Fathers, it is an explicit verse in the Torah! If we see a person doing something that apparently seems to be an act that he should not be doing, there is a full-fledged Biblical command to give him the benefit of the doubt. This is something which is codified by the Rambam, by Rabbeinu Yonah, and by the Chofetz Chaim: A person who we know to otherwise be outstanding and upright must be given the benefit of the doubt. This is not just so that we can be considered “charitable”. This is a positive Torah commandment.

In addition, there is a practical advantage that a person accrues by judging his fellow man positively. The way in which a person treats and judges his friend is the way that he will be judged in Heaven. The Mishneh [Avos 3:16] teaches that “Nifrain min ha'Adam m'daato v'shelo m'daato” a person receives his punishment in ways that he knows about and in ways that he does not know about. The Ba'al Shem Tov (1698-1760) explains the idea that a person will be punished without his knowledge (shelo m'daato) as follows: If a person witnesses an incident involving his fellow man and jumps to the conclusion that his friend is a thief, a liar, a wicked person – the “witness” will be judged similarly in the World of Truth.

Rav Pam cites a famous story of Dovid HaMelech [King David], who took Bas Sheva as his wife. Bas Sheva had previously been the wife of Uriah the Chittie. (Uriah was in the army of Dovid, where the practice was that soldiers going out to battle would first divorce their wives.) Despite the fact that she was technically not a married woman, our Sages note that this was an unbecoming act on the part of Dovid HaMelech.

Nosson HaNovi [Nathan the Prophet] came to Dovid and told him a hypothetical story of a rich man and a poor man. The poor man had only one little sheep, while the rich man had everything. The rich man, however, came and took this sole possession of the poor man away from him. Nosson asked the King for a ruling in this situation. "Dovid became very angry and said 'As G-d Lives, this man who did this is deserving of death!'" [Samuel II 12:5]. The prophet then responded "You are that man." He declared that Dovid would be judged according to his decree in the hypothetical case. "The very same sword that you proclaimed upon him will come back to haunt you and your household."

The Baal Shem Tov says that this dialogue between Dovid HaMelech and Nosson HaNovi is exactly how it will happen to each of us in the World of Truth. We will come before the Heavenly Court and we will be given a 'hypothetical case' to judge. We will be told "There was this person and he did such and such. He desecrated G-d's Name; He was not honest; and so forth. What is his fate?" We will show righteous indignation and offer all the appropriate condemnation of such a person. We will proclaim him deserving of harsh punishment. And then we will be shown that we, in fact, committed all of these sins and that we just declared our own fate.

That is the result of being unwilling to give people the benefit of the doubt. Such an attitude will eventually come back to haunt us. This is the meaning of the Mishneh that says that a person will be punished "without his knowledge". We would not have imagined that this particular trait of ours would come back to haunt us and seal our own fates.

The Gemara [Shabbath 127b] records that "One who judges his fellow man favorably, will in turn be judged favorably". This is more than "measure for measure"; this is just the way it happens. The way we 'rule' (pasken) about others – the same words, the same approach – is the way that we will be judged.

The next time that we have a doubt about someone, let us not immediately jump to conclusions. It is well known that people often like to jump to conclusions, specifically regarding the more distinguished members of the community – the Rabbis, the Torah Scholars, the leaders of the community. The "bigger" one is, the more people are apt to jump to the opposite conclusion rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt. However, one day this tendency will, Heaven forbid, come back to haunt us.

Hurting in Your Heart

by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt

We find an interesting mitzvah in this week's portion: "Don't hate your brother in your heart" ([Leviticus 19:17](#)). The Sages ask the obvious question: Why does the verse say "in your heart"? Where else does one hate?

The Sages explain that there are two ways of hating. You can feel animosity toward someone and not express it externally. You are very nice and very cordial - pleasant even. But deep down you feel anger and frustration at the person. Alternatively you can express your hatred externally - through words and deeds. You can physically, verbally or emotionally abuse the person you do not like.

Most of us are not saints. When someone does something which hurts us - whether through negligence or with intent - it is hard for us not to feel upset and angry with that person. Perhaps we might even feel animosity. This is normal human emotion and there is nothing wrong with it. The question is how one deals with that emotion once one has it.

To repress the emotion and hate a person only "in your heart" is extremely unhealthy. Unexpressed animosity does not go away. If anything, it festers and grows. The Sages remind us of the story of Absalom who hated Amnon for raping his sister, Tamar. He did not express his hatred in any way and, after a period of time, he ended up killing Amnon. So what do you do? Juxtaposed to the command not to "hate in one's heart" is the command to rebuke others for wrongdoing. It's very simple. Tell the person you are upset. Don't abuse, express. Don't attack; explain the pain you're feeling.

When someone wrongs you, don't just let it go, telling yourself it is nothing. We are not that holy. You have to approach the person and talk through what happened. Express your anger and frustration. Make the person understand that you have been hurt, and that you are not trying to make him feel guilty. You merely want to get the emotion you are feeling out of your heart. In England where I live, we're not so good at expressing emotions. But the alternative is repressed feelings of which we will eventually lose control. The idea of this commandment is to nip things in the bud. When you get the feeling out, it lessens it. When you express how you feel, it doesn't seem half as bad.

“You shall not commit a perversion of justice; you shall not favor the poor and you shall not honor the great; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow. You shall not be a gossipmonger among your people, you shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed - I am Hashem” (19:15-16)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand asks: What is the connection between judging others favorably and gossiping? Why are they juxtaposed in these two pesukim? The answer is that the posuk is teaching us the natural progression of events that lead to slander and how we can stop it from happening. When one judges someone negatively, he then has the desire to tell derogatory stories about the person. If one always judges his fellow Jew for the good and gives him the benefit of the doubt, he will never go to the next step of telling gossip about the person. The Gemara on Shabbos 127 says that judging others favorably is part of the mitzvah of bringing peace between people. Rashi on this Gemara writes that if someone always assumes that others do not mean him harm or that there were unusual circumstances when they did wrong him, he will be at peace with everyone. The Sefer HaChinuch writes that the purpose of this mitzvah of judging others favorably is so that there will be peace among all people. If one is constantly judgmental, he will have a hard time being at peace with other people. This attitude is essential for maintaining a healthy marriage, as well as for having good relationships with all people.

“You shall not round off the corner of your head, and you shall not destroy the edge of your beard” (19:27)

The Torah commands a Jewish man not to cut off his sideburns. What is the reason for this mitzvah? Rambam writes that in ancient times, the priests used to shave their heads. (Perhaps this is why they are called “galachim” in Yiddish, which comes from the Hebrew word meaning “to shave.”) Hashem wants us to keep our distance from anything connected to idolatry in any way, so He requires us to avoid imitating their shaving habits. Ibn Ezra provides a similar explanation. He writes that Hashem commanded us to maintain a hairstyle that visibly separates us from the gentile world. This public display of our difference will ensure that we keep a distance from them and avoid being influenced to follow their ways.

“You shall observe My Sabbaths and revere My Sanctuary. I am Hashem” (19:30)

Why is the prohibition against working on Shabbos repeated in the Torah again and again? Rabbeinu Bachya writes that keeping Shabbos is as important as all the other mitzvos combined because one who fails to observe Shabbos effectively denies that Hashem created the world. Why is Shabbos placed in the same posuk as the mitzvah to have reverence for the Bais HaMikdash? Rashi explains that this juxtaposition teaches that the construction of the Bais HaMikdash must be interrupted in observance of Shabbos. Chizkuni notes that this same juxtaposition and lesson was already noted back in Sefer Shemos. Why is it found a second time in Sefer Vayikra? He explains that the initial appearance of this lesson is in connection with the building of the Mishkan. We might have thought that the Bais HaMikdash, which is a holier and more permanent structure, would be different and would override the laws of Shabbos. Therefore, the Torah repeats it with the word Mikdash to show that it applies to both.

“That is why I said to you: ‘You shall possess their land, and I will give it to you so that you can inherit it, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am G-d your G-d, Who has distinguished you from the nations.” (20:24)

Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, the originator of the Daf Yomi program, asked a question that is especially relevant at this time of year, when we celebrate the establishment of the State of Israel. Considering all the remarkable features of the Land of Israel, why did HaShem describe the land by singling out milk and honey? His answer, found in Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky’s Vedibarta Bam, begins with the Code of Jewish Law, the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dei’ah 79:2, which states that a substance derived from impurity/tumah is also impure/tamei. The Gemara Bechoros 6b tells us that an animal’s milk is derived from that animal’s blood, which is an impure substance and forbidden for consumption, and yet the milk of a kosher animal is deemed to be pure and permissible for consumption. If the honey mentioned in the verse is bee’s honey, then it too is a permitted food derived from an impure source, the bee (Rashi on Shemos 13:5 says it refers to honey from dates and figs and the milk is goat’s milk; see also Kesubos 111b). Rabbi Shapiro concludes from this that Eretz Yisroel has been blessed with a unique quality: Any Jew who goes there, even one who sometimes lacks in purity, will find that the air of Eretz Yisroel will help to purify and awaken spirituality.

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Waiting Three Years

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

“When you come to the land and 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.” (Vayikra, 19:23)

In Kedoshim, the Torah introduces the mitzvah of *orlah*, whereby it is forbidden to eat any fruit that grows in the first three years of the tree. The Midrash makes an illuminating point about the Mitzva:

“Who will reveal the dust from your eyes, *Adam HaRishon* (the first man), that you could not keep to your command for one hour, behold, your children wait for the *orlah* for three years.”

The commentaries explain that Adam was commanded not to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil on the ninth hour, and he sinned by eating from it on the tenth hour, hence he only lasted one hour without sinning. In contrast, the Jewish people wait three years before eating from the fruit of a tree. In comparing the waiting of Adam to the waiting for fruit, we learn that one possible rationale for the Mitzva of *Orlah* is to develop the ability of patience.

The Kabbalistic commentaries develop the comparison between Adam HaRishon's sin and the mitzvah of *orlah* by pointing out that *Adam HaRishon* was not permanently forbidden from eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, rather he just had to wait until Shabbos. Indeed, they add that, according to the opinion that the Tree was a Grape tree, he was supposed to use its wine to make Kiddush on Shabbat. His sin was that he was too hasty and a rectification for that is for his descendants to wait before they partake of the fruit that they grow.

A student of the great Kabbalist, the Arizal, extends this idea by pointing out that Adam only had to wait three hours until the twelfth hour before he could eat from the Tree. This is why *orlah* is prohibited for the first three years: Since the first man could not wait three hours, the Torah gives us a lesson in waiting – three years to atone for Adam's sin of not waiting three hours.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand adds, based on Rabbinic sources, that immediately following the mitzvah of *orlah*, the Torah states, ‘*loh stchlu al hadam*’ which literally means, “do not eat on the blood.” The Sages derive a number of mitzvot from these words, one being not to eat from the animal until its blood is completely drained out. Rabbi Frand explains that this mitzvah is addressed to people who do not even have the patience to wait for all the blood to drain out – the Torah tells them to slow down and wait until the proper time. This is the same lesson derived from the Midrash about *orlah* – that it is fine to eat fruit, but only at the correct time.

For most people, there is no temptation to eat the meat of animal before its blood has been fully drained, nor is the mitzvah of *orlah* so common for people who do not grow their own fruit. However, the messages of these Mitzvot are still highly relevant. They teach that a person cannot always get what he wants as soon as he wants it, and that striving to get it before its proper time can be very destructive. This can apply in many areas in life – one common example is for a person looking to get married – there is the risk that he will make misjudgements in his impatience to get married. For others it can relate to waiting to find a job, or for an improvement in one's financial situation. In all these areas there can be the temptation to get frustrated or to try to speed up the process in a way that could be counter-productive.

Another very common problem with regard to patience is the temptation to react to situations hastily without undue thought and consideration. This is particularly relevant in today's world of technological advances, where one can communicate or respond immediately via email or other media of technology. In earlier times, the main way of communicating by distance was by sending a letter which was a relatively lengthy process where the person had considerable time to rethink what he wrote. Nowadays, one can respond on an email immediately and there is a great risk of something being sent without enough consideration.

Rabbi Yisroel Belsky told Rabbi Daniel Travis: "If you have to send an important letter (or email), never send it on the day that you first write it. Everything important in life needs *linat lailah*", (leaving overnight), meaning that a person needs to sleep on it. Rav Travis testifies that there were many times when he sat down at the computer and wrote an email that he didn't send right then because Rabbi Belsky told him to wait. He adds that had he sent those emails, the consequences could have easily been disastrous. Instead, he now writes a first draft and returns to it the following day to see if it can be sent as it is – almost always it needs to be rewritten.

Many relationships have been damaged by hasty responses – we learn from the mitzvah of *orlah* that sometimes it is better to wait before acting.

Weight Watchers

By Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson

"You shall not commit a perversion of justice, with [false] measures, weights, or liquid measures. You should have accurate scales and accurate weights.... I am G-d your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt." (Vayikra 19:35-36.)

"[I took you out of Egypt] on condition that you keep accurate weights and measures." (Rashi)

Amazingly, we learn that the Exodus from Egypt was conditional. Indeed the Midrash adds, "If a person denies the mitzvah of accurate measures, it is as if he denies the Exodus from Egypt!"

So important are perfect weights in G-d's books that, according to one Midrash, the Amalekites were allowed to attack the Israelites because they slacked off in regard to proper weight measurements.

Why the obsession with weight watching?

Interestingly, the prohibition regarding faulty weights includes not only their use, but even their possession, and also the creation of imperfect weights, regardless of their future function.

This isn't simply a precautionary measure to eliminate possible temptation or to ensure that they're not used by mistake; it is, rather, a demonstration of zero tolerance for falsity.

The inherent evil associated with flawed weights has less to do with the unlawful loss of money it can potentially cause than it does with the loss of integrity.

This is the reason why legal action against a thief can be taken only if his haul amounted to a minimum of one *prutah* (the smallest monetary denomination in Talmudic times), while in the case of defective weights no such minimum exists.

For, while monetary loss can be measured, the loss of integrity cannot.

This idea sheds light on an otherwise startling comment by a distinguished Talmudic commentator: "It is possible that *making* false weights is even worse than *possessing and using them*..."

Now, the question of whether the creation of false weights is worse than their possession can be debated, but how can it be argued that their creation is worse than their being used to actually steal?

Based on our earlier distinction between the loss of money and the loss of innocence, this statement becomes strikingly clear. One can readily be replaced while the other cannot.

But isn't the loss of integrity extant in theft, too? Why are dishonest measures singled out for harsher treatment?

But there is a great distinction: The average thief's deed consists of straightforward dishonesty and evil. The one with the false measures, on the other hand, is professing to the world that he is honest. "Look," he proclaims, "I'm using weights and measures to ensure that I don't steal even a penny!" Simultaneously, however, he is engaging in theft.

It is an act of duplicity. The essence of the sin of false measures – and what distinguished it from all the other laws in the Torah that are intended to safeguard personal property – is duplicity. But the Torah proscribes not only the act, but also even harboring the tools of the trade in one's home.

For it is not sufficient not to fool others; one may not fool himself either.