

Sanctity demands our precise alignment with G-d's law, even curbing the permissible. Such a code compounds the crime of one who purposefully alters G-d's Torah to permit the forbidden.

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Weekly Parsha

Acharei Mot Kedoshim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"The goat will thus carry all the sins away to a desolate area when it is sent to the wilderness." (VaYikra 16:22)

The parasha describes the service performed by the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. As part of this service,

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KEDUSHA

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

A very central theme throughout Judaism is the concept of kedusha, sanctity. Although the term seems rather abstract as Torah Jews we are commanded to constantly strive to be kadosh, to be holy. In Leviticus chapter 19 verse 2, we are commanded to be kadosh because: "I the Lord your God am holy." Chazal teach us that kedusha means to be "poreish mey arayot", abstain from the sexual prohibitions. This implies that if not for this commandment, there would be no reason for one to live a moral life style. Throughout the generations, the greatest philosophical minds without the benefit of the Torah have come to the same conclusion, based upon their rational faculty. The best life is one of abstention from the physical pleasures. It would therefore seem that the Torah is redundant.

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(Kedusha continued from page 1)

The Torah additionally instructs us to be holy because God is holy. This creates a dilemma based upon our aforesaid definition. If holy means merely to be "poresh mey arayot" what relevance does it have respecting God?

The concept of a poresh must have greater significance than simply abstaining. Pure abstention infers that the person is withholding something from himself. This would imply that the person really has the desire to do the prohibited action but he is just controlling himself. Such an idea would be nothing more than an exercise of self-restraint and denial. The Torah's concept of a poresh is not so trite. The essence of a poresh is an individual who is poresh because it is a reflection of his true nature. His energies are no longer attracted to the areas of the arayot, to the physical, but flow naturally to the area of chachma, wisdom. Insofar as ones essence is truly that of a poresh, he partakes of the "tzelem elokim". The "Boreh Olam" by his very nature, is extraneous to, and not limited by, the physical. Thus, in order for one to be a poresh from the Torah perspective, requires great intellectual conviction, whereby all ones energies flow to the acquisition of knowledge.

There is a critical distinction between the Torah's concept of "prishah" and that of the philosophers. The philosophers, although they advocated a lifestyle of "prishut", it was based upon their appreciation of human nature. They recognized that human nature has two components. Man has an instinctual nature and an intellectual nature. Based upon their investigation of human nature they concluded that man can only achieve true happiness, in the pursuits of his essential intellectual nature. They therefore preached a lifestyle of "prisha". However to the Torah Jew the concept of "prisha" has much greater significance. We are taught that if we lead a lifestyle of "prishus", then we can have a relationship with G-d. We strive to mold our nature to be essentially a Poresh, and attain "kedusha" in

order that we can relate to Hashem. In Judaism there is a metaphysical dimension if one is a true Poresh. This metaphysical relationship with the creator is only possible when one is a poresh. If one succeeds in redirecting his energies so that they naturally flow to chachma, only then will he relate to the creator, the source of reality. If a person abstains from the physical because of fear of punishment than he is not truly a poresh. Such a person is still guided by the pleasure principle. The fear of punishment is merely a means to control the person from being punished, and thereby remain in a state of pleasure. He is abstaining from the physical prohibition only because he feels that indulging said physical desires would ultimately cause him greater physical pain. However a talmid chacham is naturally drawn towards the principles of the Torah. He is in a unique state, whereby his energies naturally flow to the metaphysical. Thus we can appreciate the Torah imperative to be kadosh because "ki kadosh ani hashem elokaychem". At such a high spiritual level a person can relate to God as his energies naturally flow to chachma.

Chazal agree with the philosophers, that the life of the ideational is the best life since they hold that "kol d'racheha darchay noam", all the ways of the Torah are pleasant. It would be absurd that Hashem would command man not to live life the best way. It is obvious that God desires man to achieve happiness by living life in line with his essential nature. However the Torah recognizes that by living a life of chachma one initiates a relationship with the creator. God, who is not physical and whose essence is mirrored in the world of the ideational, commands that man aspire to live a life based upon the intellectual dictates of the Torah not predicated on the physical. Only then is one able to approach God through chachma. Since God is not subject to physical whims and passions so too man is directed to be kadosh because "ki ani hashem elokaychem kadosh". We are taught that Chazal did not fully partake of

the pleasures of this world. This does not mean that they essentially sought an austere existence. They did not believe in repressing their desires simply because they felt there was a virtue in moral restrictions. This philosophy is characteristic of Catholicism which venerates the lifestyles of priests and nuns. Nor did they have an emotional repulsion to pleasure. Quite the contrary is true because we are taught "ei efshar bli basar chazeer"; one should not refrain from eating pork because he doesn't like it. The proper attitude is for one to say that he really desires pork but that he is not having it to demonstrate his acceptance of the mitzvos. He struggles to elevate his behavior from purely the instinctual to the level of kedusha which is based upon mans true nature, his tzelem elokim. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in his book on kedusha incorporates the laws of the forbidden foods and prohibited sexual relations. His point is evident. One can only attain kedusha by channeling his energies from the basic instinctual drives of man, the sexual and appetitive and directing them to the intellect. This does not mean denial of the physical but rather an appreciation of the life of a talmid chachom.

Chazal did enjoy the benefits that God offered in this world. We are told that Rabbi was very wealthy and there was nothing lacking from on his table. However, he did not direct his energies to the physical. He had the blessings of the physical world which he did not deny, but his energies were not drawn to the physical. He lived the life of a kadosh as evidenced by his appellation. His energies naturally flowed to chachma.

Whereas by Iyov, Chazal tell us that the reason Iyov lost his wealth was because he had an over attachment to materialism. He viewed it as an end in and of itself. However, after he realized that the physical was only a means to relate to Hashem, not an end, was he capable of regaining his riches. After learning this lesson and redirecting his energies, he used his prosperity

simply as a means in Avodas Hashem.

The Vilna Gaon explains the concept of "pas bemelach tochal", that one should subsist on bread and salt. This is not to be taken literally as espousing an austere existence. The Gaon explains that at the beginning of ones learning he must "pas b'melach tochal". This means that if one is to succeed as a talmid chocham, it demands total commitment. If one is fortunate to live a life of kedusha his energies must naturally flow toward chachmas hatorah.

Rashi teaches us that the parsha of Kedoshim is so basic that "kol goofay hatorah teluyin bah", all the basic principles of the Torah are summarized within it. This obviously can not be taken literally for most of the 613 commandments are not within the parsha of Kedoshim. Rashi is expressing the importance of the concept of kedusha. It is such a vital and essential concept to the Torah observant Jew, that adherence to its basic principles can lead one to perfection as a Ben Torah.

Therefore, the mitzvah of kedusha is an extremely valuable concept in Judaism. The imperative of kedoshim teheeyoo must be appreciated in the proper perspective. We must be scrupulous in our pursuit of true kedusha. If one abstains from being a zolell vesorah, a glutton because of health reasons, he is not fulfilling the commandment. He is simply persuing one desire in favor of another. His desire for longevity has displaced his appetitive desires. Such a person's energies are still rooted in the physical pleasures. True kedusha requires a painstaking process where one works to channel his energies to the learning of Torah and its teaching. Ultimately he can aspire to kedusha where his energies will naturally flow to chachma since the learning of Torah will give him the greatest pleasure. Thus, he will obtain true kedusha and be blessed with an appreciation of "ki kadosh ani hashem elokaychem" and be fortunate to have a metaphysical relationship with the creator. ■

Does G-d Cause All Events?

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Written by student

Minchas Chinuch on “Nakama” - Revenge

The Chinuch says if something negative happens to us by the hands of Ruben, had it not been him, Simon would have afflicted us. The Chinuch describes what sounds like an inevitable occurrence, and not a chance phenomenon. Meaning, it was G-d's will. However, we are posed with a problem. For if it was G-d's will, does this mean Ruben does not receive punishment? The Chinuch quotes King David saying upon his receipt of Shimi's curse, “it is G-d's will.” It appears on the surface that David did not hold Shimi accountable for his curse. If this is so, why did David later advise Solomon to eliminate Shimi? It would then follow, if events are G-d's will, why should I ever take another person to court?

In the Chinuch's law of Maakeh, parapet, he teaches that miracles are not to be relied upon. We are to build a parapet on our roofs, lest someone fall and die. Since nature is that people stumble, and we don't rely on miracles, we must safeguard others from death and harm. Natural laws exist, and chance occurrences happen. Here, the Chinuch appears to contradict what he wrote in the previous law of revenge. The question is, do events occur by chance, or through G-d's will? How may we resolve this seeming contradiction?

Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed

Maimonides cites Torah instances where individuals refer to events as “G-d's will.” (Dover ed. pp. 249) Some take this to mean that all events are directly willed or caused by G-d. However, Maimonides teaches that such references

are made to merely indicate the perspective of the individual, i.e., that he views all events as results of G-d's original will Who set the world into existence. “G-d as cause” is merely a reference to the original Cause of all events.

We digress to help answer our questions.

G-d's will is also that man be subject to nature. Hence, one has no knowledge whether an event was divine will, or nature. If so, why are we commanded to bless G-d for miracles that have occurred for us? Does this not contradict the perspective that we are ignorant of when miracles occur? We may answer that certain events obligate man in praise of G-d, regardless of our absolute knowledge of that event being miraculous. Our obligation is to “treat certain events as miraculous”. We must regard it as “miracle”, although ignorant if it was a miracle. We are commanded to “treat” special events with certain awe.

This tangent helps us answer the Chinuch: A person must regard a negative event “as if” it is a punishment from G-d. We all have sins, and to that extent, we must realize that G-d does in fact have a system of punishment. We then treat a negative event as an opportunity for introspection. Referring to this event as a “cause of G-d” does not mean G-d willed this “specific event”, but that He is the ultimate cause. It refers to man's proper perspective. David referred to Shimi's curse as G-d's will, in the sense that G-d is the ultimate cause of all, and this was David's perspective. David didn't attack Shimi “at the time of the curse”, as this would be revenge. However, his command to Solomon

much later on to avenge Shimi's evil, displays that this was not a violation of revenge, but to secure the kingdom.

Monetary loss is also in man's right of claim. But pure revenge is prohibited, as revenge forfeits introspection. When seeking revenge, one lives in the world of the relative, instead of using these valued opportunities for our perfection – man's primary goal. Therefore, when we say one should view it as punishment, it means that one should use this as an opportunity for perfection. It is addressing the “perspective”, not the immediate cause of the negative events.

The desire to avenge someone for his perceived wrong displays one's own corruption. Placing value on another person's words plays into the subjective value system. However, a righteous person does not value a person's words although they produce discomfort in others - he values G-d's word alone. What G-d deems as important is the righteous person's sole barometer of good and evil. Another person's ridicule cannot shake his values, but rather, it is an opportunity to introspect.

Joseph's response to his brothers that “you have not sent me here (Egypt)” teaches the same concept. Joseph knew his brothers sold him; he was there at the sale! But we derive Joseph's perspective, as viewing untoward incidents as part of G-d's actions. Joseph orchestrates his brother's repentance; hence, the brothers were at fault. But Joseph's perspective was always measured in its effect on his relationship with G-d.

Even if one does not know if he sinned, one should use a mishap as an opportunity to perfect himself, regardless of the cause of the mishap, be it via man, animal, or nature. □

two male goats are selected. One goat is offered as a chatat sacrifice. The other goat is the Azazel.

The Azazel is a very unusual service. The Kohen Gadol recites, over the goat, a confession on behalf of the nation. However, the Azazel is not sacrificed upon the altar. This goat is delivered into the hands of an appointed individual. This person leads the Azazel into the wilderness and pushes it over a cliff.

The Azazel service is an essential component of the atonement process of Yom Kippur. When the Temple existed and this service was performed, the Almighty provided a miraculous demonstration of this atonement. The Talmud explains that a scarlet thread was broken into halves. One half was tied between the horns of the Azazel. The other half was tied to a rock near the cliff. The goat was pushed from the cliff. The atonement was demonstrated through the scarlet thread. With the destruction of the goat, the thread would turn white.[1]

The service of Yom Kippur is performed by the Kohen Gadol.[2] One of the duties of the Kohen Gadol is to read from the Torah to the nation. The High Priest leaves the Temple and enters the courtyard. He reads portions of the Torah related to Yom Kippur. There is an interesting connection between the reading of the Torah and the Azazel. The Kohen cannot leave the Temple and begin the reading until the Azazel goat reaches the wilderness.[3]

What is the reason for this relationship? It would seem that the Kohen Gadol cannot leave the Temple until the Azazel service is completed. This relationship implies that the service is completed when the goat reached the wilderness.

This suggests an interesting contradiction. The atonement brought about by the Yom Kippur service was demonstrated by the transformation of the scarlet thread. Maimonides confirms that this thread turned white when the Azazel was forced off the cliff.[4] This implies that the Azazel service is completed only at this point. It would follow that the Kohen Gadol should not leave the sanctuary until this moment. Yet, Maimonides explains that the Kohen Gadol leaves the Temple at the moment the goat reaches the wilderness!

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Ztl suggests that this contradiction can be resolved through considering a related issue. It is normally prohibited for a spiritually unclean individual to enter the Temple. However, an exception is made in the Azazel service. The Azazel is delivered into the hands of an individual appointed to lead the animal into the wilderness. If this individual becomes defiled, he is permitted to enter the Temple.[5] Why is this exception made?

Rav Soloveitchik explains that among the duties of the Kohen Gadol is the delivery of the goat to this individual. The High Priest is not permitted to

leave the Temple during the service. In order for the Kohen Gadol to perform his task, the appointed person is required to enter the Temple. Therefore, even if this person becomes unclean, he is required to enter.

Rav Soloveitchik further explains Maimonides' position. Maimonides maintains that the Kohen Gadol does not fulfill his responsibility with the delivery of the goat to the appointed individual. The Azazel is delivered in order to be sent away to the wilderness. It follows that the execution of the Kohen Gadol's duty requires two steps. The Azazel must be delivered to the appointed person. This person must reach the wilderness. In other words, the duty of the Kohen Gadol is completed with the arrival of the goat to the wilderness.

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that we must take one additional step in order to understand Maimonides' position. The atonement of the Azazel is not affected until it is pushed from the cliff. This is part of the service of the Azazel. However, this aspect of the service is not a duty of the Kohen Gadol. The High Priest is required to send the goat to the wilderness. Subsequent aspects of the service are beyond the duty of the Kohen Gadol.

Now, Maimonides can be fully understood. The Kohen Gadol cannot not leave the Temple until his responsibilities regarding the Azazel are executed. These responsibilities are completed when the appointed individual reaches the wilderness. The atonement process requires the goat to be destroyed. This is not the duty of the Kohen Gadol. Therefore, as soon as goat reaches the wilderness the Kohen Gadol is permitted to enter the courtyard and read to the nation.[6]

“Do not lie with a male as you would with a woman. It is a disgusting act.” (VaYikra 18:22)

The Torah prohibits various sexual relations. These prohibitions are discussed in our parasha. One of the relationships that are explicitly mentioned is male homosexuality. In our modern society the morality of this prohibition is widely challenged. However, there can be no doubt that the Torah unequivocally prohibits this behavior.

What are the objections raised against this prohibition? Among the criticisms is the claim that the homosexual is not evil. He cannot control his sexual preference. Perhaps, the preference is even genetically “hard-wired” into his personality. It is not fair to essentially deprive the homosexual of sexual expression.

Another more radical criticism is that sexual preference is subjective. It is inappropriate to label heterosexual behavior as proper and homosexual behavior as a perversion. Two people study a single piece of art. The beauty of the work inspires one. The other observer finds the work boring and

mediocre. Is one correct and the other mistaken? Of course not! Each is entitled to his or her individual opinion. Why should the issue of sexual preference be treated differently? How can heterosexuality be regarded as more proper than homosexual preferences?

How do we respond to these issues? The first step is to realize that we do not apologize for the Torah. In other words, the Torah is the word of G-d. It does not derive its legitimacy from our acquiescence to its wisdom. Consider a simple analogy. The law of gravity is one of the Almighty's creations. If a person jumps off a ten-story building, he will experience the effects of gravity. These effects are not influenced by the jumper's attitude toward the law and its wisdom. Gravity is a reality! The laws of the Torah derive their reality from the same source as the law of gravity. Both are expressions of the Divine will. Neither needs our approval. In short, the Torah's condemnation of homosexuality is clear. This means the behavior is prohibited regardless of our questions regarding the justice of the prohibition.

Nonetheless, we are commanded to study the Torah. The mitzvot are a source of wisdom. We do not study the Torah to justify its laws. We study the Torah to learn from it. What can we learn from the Torah's prohibition of homosexuality?

Nachmanides notes that the prohibition of homosexuality is adjacent to the restriction against bestiality. He explains that these two mitzvot share a common theme. Both of these relations cannot result in conception and procreation. Nachmanides explains that the sexual desire is designed to operate in the service of procreation. This suggests that homosexuality and bestiality are perversions of the sexual drive.[7]

It does not follow that a sexual act that cannot result in pregnancy is immoral. There is no prohibition against sexual relations between a man and his wife that will not result in conception. For example, it is unlikely that a nursing mother will conceive. Nonetheless, this husband and wife may have relations.

Nachmanides' position is that in the homosexual or bestial relationship the object of sexual desire is not suitable for the purpose of procreation. Therefore, these relationships represent a perversion of the sexual drive. In the case of a man and woman engaging in sexual relations that will not result in conception, the sexual desire is not perverted. The object of the drive is essentially suitable for procreation. Consequently, no perversion exists.

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra's comments that the male and the female are created with a specific biological design. This design suggests that the male and female are the appropriate partners in the sexual act. Homosexuality ignores the basic

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biological design of the human species.[8]

It seems that according to Ibn Ezra, the will of the Almighty is expressed in the physical design of the human being. Therefore, homosexual relations represent an overt denial of the Creator's will.

It must be acknowledged that the homosexual may be an innocent victim of his desires. His engagement in homosexual relations does not necessarily represent a desire to rebel against the Almighty's plan. Also, we cannot assume that a specific homosexual repudiates the importance of procreation or the benefits of a heterosexual orientation. The homosexual may agree with the position of Nachmanides and Ibn Ezra but find himself unable to control his preference and desire. This is a tragedy. However, homosexual behavior is nonetheless prohibited. Every person is confronted with desires that the individual knows are wrong. In some cases, we may be unable to control our urge to act on these desires. This does not make the behavior correct.

[1] Tractate Yoma 67a.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avotad Yom HaKippurim 1:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avotad Yom HaKippurim 3:8.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Yoma, Chapter 6. See also Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avotad Yom HaKippurim 3:7.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avotad Yom HaKippurim 5:21.

[6] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Kobetz Chidushai Torah, pp. 120-122.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 18:22.

[8] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 18:22.

“Speak to the entire congregation of Bnai Yisrael and say to them, “You shall be holy, for I Hashem you G-d is holy”. (VaYikra 19:2)

Hashem commands Moshe to address Bnai Yisrael. Moshe is to command the people to conduct their affairs in holiness. He is to relate this responsibility to the holiness of the Almighty.

The exact meaning of the message that Moshe was to deliver is not clear. What is Moshe requiring of the people? They are already commanded to observe the mitzvot. Certainly holiness emerges from obedience to the commandments! What additional requirement is Moshe establishing?

pasuk. Hashem is holy. But what is the meaning of this assertion? It would seem that the term holiness, used in reference to the Almighty, is related to His unfathomable essence. We do not share the Creator's unique nature. It would seem that the holiness of a human must be different from His holiness. Yet, somehow the pasuk relates human holiness to the sanctity of Hashem. What is the connection?

Sforno explains that the pasuk does not create a new command. Instead, the pasuk is providing a reason for the mitzvot. Observance of the Torah endows a person with sanctity. Sforno further explains that through achieving personal sanctity we imitate the Almighty. This is expressed in the pasuk. We are to be holy because Hashem is holy. Through observance of the Torah, we imitate the holiness of Hashem.[1]

These comments answer one of our questions. Moshe is not establishing a new requirement. He is explaining one of the purposes of Torah observance. Observance endows us with sanctity. However, the second problem remains. How is human holiness compared to the sanctity of the Almighty?

In order to fully understand Sforno's comments, we must analyze the meaning of imitating the Almighty. Maimonides discusses this issue in his Mishne Torah, Hilchot Deyot. He explains that a person should conduct oneself with moderation. A person should not anger easily. Neither should we be insensitive to personal abuse. A person should not be a glutton. It is also inappropriate to deprive ourselves of needed food and nutrition. One should choose the path of moderation, between the extremes. Maimonides explains that the moderate life-style is the most healthy.[2]

Maimonides then explains that in following the path of moderation a person imitates the Almighty. Hashem is kind. We too must be kind. Hashem is merciful. We must be merciful. The moderate individual possesses these behaviors and attitudes. This person imitates Hashem.[3]

Maimonides is providing two reasons for pursuing the path of moderation. First, he explains that this is the healthiest life-style. Second, he explains that through moderation we imitate the behavior of Hashem.

There is a profound message in Maimonides' analysis. How can we measure the degree of a person's spiritual perfection? This is not a simple question to answer. When dealing with material objects, it is far easier to measure perfection. Consider the example of a pen. In order to measure the degree of perfection of a specific pen, we merely need to compare it to the ideal. A pen is a writing instrument. The ideal pen will be one which best accomplishes this objective. The specific pen can be evaluated relative to this ideal. The same

analysis can be applied to all material objects.

However, in evaluating spiritual perfection this analysis fails. We must define the spiritual ideal. This step is essential if we are to evaluate the specific person. What is the spiritual ideal? Maimonides provides a method for defining the spiritual ideal. The ideal is defined by the behavior of the Almighty. He is the ultimate model of spiritual perfection. We can now measure the degree of our own perfection. We approach spiritual perfection to the extent that we imitate Hashem.

Now the message of Sforno can be fully understood. The term holiness is used to describe spiritual excellence. This excellence is defined by the behaviors of the Almighty. Through following the laws of the Torah, we imitate Hashem. In this manner we achieve holiness. We approach the spiritual ideal defined by the Almighty's behavior.

“Every person should fear his mother and father and keep my Shabbat. I am Hashem your G-d.” (VaYikra 19:3)

The Torah commands us to treat our parents with respect and awe. Parents especially appreciate this commandment. It creates a family structure and fosters a social order. Our sages observed that these mitzvot also promote other less obvious values. One of these values is appreciation of the Almighty. We honor and fear our parents because we appreciate the benefits that they bestow upon us. Our very life is made possible through our parents. However, we owe an even greater debt of appreciation to Hashem. Through our behaviors and attitudes towards our parents, we train ourselves to appreciate others and not take their benevolence for granted. Hopefully, this attitude will be applied to our relationship with the Almighty.[4]

Gershonides notes another important outcome of these commandments. In order to understand his observation, an introduction is required.

In Perkei Avot, our Sages exhort us to make for ourselves a Rav or teacher.[5] On the simplest level, the Sages are cautioning the student against attempting to master the Torah without the assistance of a teacher. The teacher provides the student with essential guidance.[6] Why is this guidance so important? The answer requires that we understand the basic nature of Torah scholarship. Our Sages explain that Torah scholarship is not achieved through merely memorizing facts and developing a fluency and mastery with these facts. Instead, the Torah scholar must understand the underlying conceptual basis for the facts.[7] Such an understanding cannot be acquired through reading a list of texts. Even if a person commits the entire Talmud to memory, this person cannot be regarded as a scholar. Torah

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and determine when the student is ready to develop to the next stage. With this guidance, the student can become a true scholar.

However, there is another message in this lesson from Perkei Avot. The commentaries note that the Sages did not say that the student should acquire or secure the assistance of a Rav. They said that a person should make for oneself a Rav. This is an odd expression. What is meant by the phrase “make a Rav”?

Maimonides and others comment that the Sages are alluding to specific issue. It is not always possible to find a Rav. The inexperienced student and even the novice scholar can expect to find a more advanced scholar to serve as a guide. However, what is the recourse available to the more advanced student? This more advanced student may not find a suitable teacher to provide guidance and direction. What course

scholarship requires understanding, synthesis, and insight – not mere memorization.

Understanding is difficult to achieve. It must be developed slowly and sequentially. The student builds new concepts upon prior conclusions. As the student’s understanding develops and expands, additional areas of the Torah become comprehensible. Furthermore, with intense study the student’s mind and modes of thinking expand and are refined. The student slowly develops into a novice scholar. Eventually, the patient novice can achieve erudition. However, this development requires guidance. Without the invaluable guidance of the teacher, the student does not know where to begin. The student may settle for superficiality. Even worse, the student may delve into issues beyond one’s grasp. The result is that a faulty foundation is created. Any structure is limited by the integrity of its foundation. If the student lacks a sound foundation, all further attempts to understand the Torah will be undermined.

The guidance of the Rav allows the student to develop systematically. The teacher understands the Torah. The Rav guides the student in a systematic program and progression. The teacher can tell the student where to begin one’s studies. The Rav can evaluate the progress of the student

should this person choose?

Maimonides explains that the phrase “make a Rav” refers to this situation. Sometimes a more advanced student may not be able to secure a guide. There is no existing suitable Rav for this person to pursue. This student must “make a Rav”. The Rav will not be the ideal guide. Nonetheless, this novice scholar must appoint someone as Rav. Why is this necessary?

Maimonides explains that knowledge and understanding are developed through the exchange of ideas. The student must expose his or her conclusions to critical analysis and review. This free exchange of ideas is crucial to achieving an objective and refined understanding of the Torah.[8]

Gershonides extends the insight of Perkei Avot to the commandments regarding our parents. Gershonides explains that just as the Torah scholar requires a guide, so does the child. Every young person faces innumerable challenges and obstacles in the process of personal development. The parent shields the child from the challenges that are beyond the capacity of the youngster. The parent exposes the child to appropriate challenges and responsibilities. The parent provides guidance and counsel. At the very least, the parent provides an invaluable review of the child’s conclusions and

decisions. The parent, in the personal development of the child, performs all of the tasks that the Rav performs in facilitating the intellectual development of the scholar.

These commandments are designed to foster and encourage this mentor relationship. A child who respects his or her parents and holds them in awe is more likely to accept these parents as guides.

Some children will challenge this analysis. Children sometimes question the qualifications of their parents to provide guidance. After all, the student chooses a mentor based on the teacher’s qualifications. We do not choose our parents. It is easy to become a parent. It is far more difficult to provide effective guidance.

Gershonides acknowledges this issue. However, he points out that parents generally have a unique and important qualification to serve as mentors for their children. Parents are instinctively bound to their children. They feel a selfless love for their offspring. A parent will often even place the welfare of the child before his or her personal interests. The child cannot find any other mentor that has as deep a commitment and interest in the child’s interests. So, although parents – like everyone – make mistakes, they tend to be very dedicated and selfless guides. This is a qualification that certainly recommends the parent for the position of mentor. It should also be noted that there is a benefit in “making a teacher.” As we have explained, every person gains from exposing conclusions and perceptions to a second opinion. This is true even if an equal provides the second opinion. Some children surpass the accomplishments of their parents. They achieve greater wealth and success. They are more educated than their parents are and even worldlier. However, their parents are an invaluable asset. They can provide honest feedback and review.[9]□

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 19:2.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Deyot 1:1-4.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Deyot 1:5-6.

[4] Rav Ahron HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 33.

[5] Mesechet Avot 1:6.

[6] Rabbaynu Menachem Me’eri, Bait HaBechirah, Mesechet Avot 1:6.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 21:1.

[8] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Avot 1:6.

[9] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1997), p 292.

The Plague of Hail

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Written by student

The plague of hail was the first plague, of the third group of plagues in Egypt. This third group included plagues taking effect in the heavens: hail, locusts (via the wind), and darkness. G-d wished to demonstrate His control in all areas of the universe.

G-d said, "I will send all my wonders to his heart" (Exod. 9:14) meaning, all subsequent plagues – commencing with hail – will have new effect. To what effect does G-d refer? Moses instructed Egypt to "send all animals into your house". We learn that the plagues were not punitive measures. Moses offered Pharaoh and Egypt an escape route. "Those who feared the word of G-d" (ibid, 9:20) removed them from field. Those who "didn't take to heart G-d's word", left his slaves and animals outside, and they were harmed. Moses' warning prior to the plague teaches that the plagues were instructive, and not intended for harm.

We notice in these two verses, that the second, contrasting verse does not say, those who "didn't fear G-d"...instead, it says, those who "didn't take to heart" G-d's word". Why isn't the terminology consistent? Why isn't fear contrasted to those who "didn't fear"? We may also ask why we need to know that some Egyptians heeded Moses' warning, and some didn't.

We read further and find Pharaoh saying, "this time I have sinned, G-d is righteous, and I am my nation are wicked." (Exod. 9:27) What may we derive from the Torah recording this response? Further, verse 9:30 reads, "You and your servants do not yet fear G-d." Ramban interprets this verse as Moses addressing Pharaoh, "...it is only before the removal of the plague that you possess fear". Meaning, once the plague is removed, you will again revert to your old, stubborn ways. What is Moses' purpose in telling this to Pharaoh? And why even remove the plague if Pharaoh doesn't truly maintain his fear?

"The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk. And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." (Exod, 9:31,32)

Why does the Torah deem it necessary to narrate the devastation? Ramban says this is no narration, but the verses are a continuation of Moses' dialogue with Pharaoh. If so, what is Moses telling Pharaoh by referring to the status of the grain?

I would suggest the following answer: The Plagues were not to save the Jews. If so, G-d could have saved them with one plague. The prevalent view is that the 10 Plagues were punitive measures. It appears from this plague, that this is not so. The plagues were "Chasdei Hashem", "kindness of G-d". Their purpose was to be a clear-cut, unequivocal demonstration of G-d's power. For this reason, the plagues became progressively stronger. Teaching Egypt the fallacy of idolatry and the reality of the Creator was the purpose in each successive plague.

"For this time I will send all my wonders to your heart, and in your servants and in your people, in order that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the land." (Exod. 9:14)

The plagues were not a punishment, but rather, education. The fact there was "fearers of G-d" teaches us that the objective was realized, some Egyptians did fear G-d through His education via the plagues. But those "who did not give heart to the matter" is to teach that there are none that "didn't fear", but only those who deny reality. "Didn't give heart", means that in order to oppose G-d's absolute truths, they had to shut their hearts and minds from any investigation. It is not the absence of fear, but a more primary block: they denied any investigation into the plagues.

Moses never used the pressure of the plagues to obtain concessions from Pharaoh. The plagues' purpose was to teach Egypt knowledge of G-d. Moses always removed the plague upon Pharaoh's request, and Moses did not hold out on removing the plague until Pharaoh conceded to Moses' requests. Moses wished that Egypt recognized G-d through wisdom, not coercion.

This explains Moses words: He informed Pharaoh that his superficial relenting to the plagues was worthless. Pharaoh merely swung between two emotional states, with no repentance: under the pressure of the plagues, he swore freedom, but once removed, Pharaoh reverted to obstinacy.

"The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk. And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later."

With these words, Moses directs Pharaoh to an analog: G-d is the source of both nature, and man: "G-d has been compassionate to you, (flexible crops) but at a certain point, this kindness will no longer be extended. When sin is matured, (stiff crops) there is no turning back, and you will snap as do stiff crops." This was Moses' message to Pharaoh. Man sins by nature, and therefore, G-d affords man opportunities to correct his ways. But once sin captivates the whole personality and values of any given man or people, G-d will destroy that person or people. This plague was a warning to Pharaoh - in the form of an analogy.

Man feels he may sin and repent later, but there may not be a later. The opportunity to repent is a Divine gift, and must be seized when presented, lest we lose the chance. There is a point of no return.

We learn of the compassion of G-d on His creations, on mankind. G-d allows man time to exert his free will to bring himself in line with truth. "Those who He loves, G-d rebukes". The plagues were an attempt to remove Egypt's false ideas, enabling them to embrace G-d's absolute truths. ▣

Sexual

PROHIBITIONS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In our parsha, Acharay Mos, (Lev. 18) we read the introductory verses for the sexual prohibitions:

16:3: "As the acts of the land of Egypt where you dwelled, do not perform, and as the acts of the land of Canaan where I bring you there, do not perform, and in their statutes, do not walk."

We must understand; G-d does not simply desire us to refrain from these two cultures' actions. It is deeper: these cultures' activities are harmful in nature. Therefore, G-d commands that we do not indulge. Their corruption stems from nowhere else than man's own nature. Where else did Egypt and Canaan develop such practices, as we read further? All philosophical and moral corruptions are either learned, or developed independent from others. Meaning, they all start with a corrupt person, and are not part of that which exists outside of man, i.e., G-d's creation. The sexual deviations listed in our parsha must be understood, if we are to truly benefit from our act of abstention. Refraining from an action without understanding why we refrain does not perfect our minds. In such a case, our minds are not playing any role. Perfection is always "perfection in thought". Our actions must be an expression of an idea apprehended and valued by each one of us. We must understand why these prohibitions are good for man. As we continue, I intend to quote Maimonides and Ramban as they disclose some direction.

"Each and every man, to all those closely related in flesh, do not draw near to uncover (their) nakedness, I am G-d."

What is problematic with sexual relations with a relative of such close relations? Rashi states, when Shimone and Levi destroyed the city of Shechem and rescued their sister Dinah; she said to Shimone she would not leave Shechem unless he married her. Additionally, deduction teaches that Adam's children must have wed their own sisters. If in the cases of such righteous people, marriage to family members was not viewed as corrupt, for what reason does G-d command us to refrain from such unions?

We also notice that the term "shi-air" – close relative – is reserved for only three cases, out of the dozen or so cases enumerated herein. If at the outset, the introductory verse commands "...to all those closely related ("shi-air") in flesh, do not draw near to uncover (their) nakedness", we would assume that the reference of "shi-air" applies without

exception. Why then, later, only in connection with our parents' sisters, or the taking of a woman and her daughter together, do we find the term "shi-air"? But all other sexual deviations are not considered "shi-air", "close relative"?

Let us read Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed on this topic (Book III, Chap. XLIX):

"...The law about forbidden sexual intercourse seeks in all its parts to inculcate the lesson that we ought to limit sexual intercourse altogether; hold it in contempt, and only desire it very rarely. The prohibition of pederasty (Lev. xviii. 22) and carnal intercourse with beasts (ibid. 73) is very clear. If in the natural way the act is too base to be performed except when needed, how much more base is it if performed in an unnatural manner, and only for the sake of pleasure."

Here, Maimonides lays the foundation, that sexual pleasure has its place, but should not be of any central focus. Holding it in "contempt" does not mean to deny the importance G-d saw in procreation being very pleasurable. He means that it must not become a value - something to be pursued. We must not compromise our true objective and joyous pursuit of discovering new knowledge, regardless of how sensually enjoyable another activity may be. Maimonides continues:

"The female relatives whom a man may not marry are alike in this respect that as a rule they are constantly together with him in his house: they would easily listen to him, and do what he desires; they are near at hand, and he would have no difficulty in procuring them. No judge could blame him if found in their company. If to these relatives the same law applied as to all other unmarried women, if we were allowed to marry any of them, and were only precluded from sexual intercourse with them without marriage, most people would constantly have become guilty of misconduct with them. But as they are entirely forbidden to us, and sexual intercourse with them is most emphatically denounced unto us as a capital crime, or a sin punishable with extinction (karet), and as there is no means of ever legalizing such intercourse, there is reason to expect that people will not seek it, and will not think of it. That the persons included in that prohibition are, as we have stated, at hand and easily accessible, is evident. For as a rule, the mother of the wife, the grandmother, the

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"If to these relatives the same law applied as to all other unmarried women, if we were allowed to marry any of them, and were only precluded from sexual intercourse with them without marriage, most people would constantly have become guilty of misconduct with them."

daughter, the granddaughter, and the sister-in-law, are mostly with her; the husband meets them always when he goes out, when he comes in, and when he is at his work. The wife stays also frequently in the house of her husband's brother, father, or son. It is also well known that we are often in the company of our sisters, our aunts, and the wife of our uncle, and are frequently brought up together with them. These are all the relatives, which we must not marry. This is one of the reasons why intermarriage with a near relative is forbidden."



We must distinguish between a nation, and the perfected, Biblical personalities. Marriage to sisters could not be avoided in G-d's plan of populating the world, while commencing mankind with just one male and one female. A brother had to marry either his sister or mother to beget children. In Jacob's case, (his marriage to two sisters) and Jacob's children Shimone and Dinah, no sexual promiscuity, deviation or excess existed. These individuals were so perfected; they obtained G-d's favor, and his prophecy. We must not make the age-old error of projecting our emotional makeup onto G-d's selected leaders, psychoanalyzing the pillars of Judaism. However, when guiding a nation, where morality is not naturally at its optimum, (for no nation is comprised exclusively of perfected individuals), a law must govern man's sexuality. Maimonides taught very clearly:

"If to these relatives the same law applied as to all other unmarried women, if we were allowed to marry any of them, and were only precluded from sexual intercourse with them without marriage, most people would constantly have become guilty of misconduct with them."

Maimonides teaches that constant contact with family members will most definitely lead to sexual misconduct,

had the Torah not categorically barred these relationships. This also teaches that such relationships are not abhorrent, but prohibited. The Jews were actually recorded as "crying by the household" (Numbers, 11:10) upon receipt of the Torah. On this verse, Rashi interprets "by the household" to mean, "about the household", or rather matters of the house, i.e., the laws forbidden sexual relations with household relatives. We learn that the Jews had relations with immediate family members, prior to the Torah. There was yet no prohibiting law. Once the Jews received the Torah, they had great difficulty and sadness about the prohibition of sexuality with those family members.

Unrepressed vs Unrestrained Sexuality

Growing up with such prohibitions, we harbor sexual repugnance towards these relatives. However true this is, the Torah and the Rabbis do not fall prey to human repression, and both parties praise those who dream of intercourse with his mother or sister:

Talmud Berachos 57a:

"...If one has intercourse in his dream with his mother, he should anticipate understanding, as it says, 'If but to understanding you call out...' (Proverbs, 2:3. The word "if" in Hebrew is spelled exactly like "mother" and the verse can be read, "... 'Mother' may understanding be called...". This implies a direct relationship between one's mother and understanding.)

"...If one has intercourse in his dream with his sister, he should anticipate wisdom, as it says, 'Say to wisdom, thou art my sister...' (Proverbs, 7:4)

This Talmudic portion teaches an important lesson: one who has little repression in the area of the sexual drives, to the point where he can successfully dream of intercourse with these close relatives, is one whose mind is relatively uninhibited. He is one who will be able to ponder all areas of Torah without any restraint. He will most certainly uncover great insights, as his mind is unbridled. The event of such a dream means that he has now reached a new level of objectivity, and now, he should anticipate wisdom and understanding to a greater level than before. Do not understand this Talmudic portion mystically, for mysticism is only in your imagination. This Talmudic portion is describing the perfection in one who has such dreams, whereby such perfection must lead to greater knowledge. It is natural that when one perfects his mind and his emotions, that he will have such dreams. It is not the dream per se which causes new insight, but the perfection that already exists in this person prior to the dream. (Do not be confused, and view the effect as the cause. Do not view the dream as what gives this person wisdom, as the dream is an 'effect' of the perfection that already exists, just as greater knowledge is also an effect of this perfection.)

But be careful with this last statement. Guard yourselves from confusing unrepressed individuals, with unrestrained sexuality: the former is limited to unconscious thought alone; the latter is real, physical corruption. However, those Jews who violate any of these sexual laws, for example, embracing

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homosexuality, are in direct violation of G-d's very words: (Lev. 18:29) "For anyone who commits any one of these abominations, those souls will be cut off..." This is a most severe punishment. Therefore, the new movement we hear of, "acceptance of homosexuality" is a clear denial of G-d's.

We learn that our G-d given Torah is absolutely honest and perfectly in line with reality. G-d created and fully understands human emotion and desire. His Torah is a perfect guidebook, which we are foolish to distort in any shape or form. It is laughable that man creates new forms of "Judaism". These new forms of Reform and Conservative Judaism are inherently flawed, as neither one possesses true validation, i.e., miraculous evidence. Torah is validated as truth, due to the miracles witnessed at its moment of inheritance, at Sinai. It is for this reason we know it as G-d's word. Until Reform and Conservative Judaism can make such claims to miraculous validation for their edits, G-d's word remains more valid than theirs. Rabbi Mann wished to comment that the law sentencing a false prophet to death is also problematic for Reform Judaism: The Torah places G-d's words as the very validation of Torah. But as Reform Judaism claims that the Torah is not G-d's own words, their reformed Judaism loses all worth. They are truly in a contradiction: they retain G-d's Torah words, sentencing false prophets to death, but simultaneously claim the Torah is not the Divine as stated by original, Orthodox Judaism! How can they value the Torah, which contains the death sentence for those who oppose "G-d's words", and simultaneously hold the position that the Torah is not "G-d's words"? Simply astounding! We digressed, but for good reason.

"Root and Branch"

Maimonides now continues, but offers his understanding, referring to a "root and branch":

"But according to my opinion the prohibition serves another object, namely, to inculcate chastity into our hearts. License between the 'root' and the 'branch', between a man and his mother; or his daughter, is insolent ("chutzpah gedolah"). The intercourse between root and branch is forbidden, and it makes no difference whether the male element is the root or the branch, or both root and branch combine in the intercourse with a third person, so that the same individual cohabits with the root and with the branch (i.e., man cohabiting with a woman and her daughter). On this account it is prohibited to marry a woman and her mother; the wife of the father or of the son; for in all these cases there is the intercourse between one and the same person on the one side and root and branch on the other.

The law concerning brothers is like the law concerning root and branch. The sister is forbidden, and so is also the sister of the wife and the wife of the brother; because in the latter cases two persons, who are considered like root and branch, cohabit with the same person. But in these prohibitions brothers and sisters are partly considered as root and branch and partly as one body; the sister of the mother is therefore like the mother, and the sister of the father like the father, and both are prohibited."

What is Maimonides taking about with this "root and branch"? We may ask, "What is the relationship between the root of a tree, and its branch?" The root causes the generation of the branch by supplying water. But how does this help us understand Maimonides' cryptic words?

Maimonides is clearly referring to the parent/child relationship with his term "root and branch". He distinguishes between sexual activity between parent and child, and between sexual activities with all others. He refers to the former as "insolent", meaning audaciously rude or disrespectful. (Be mindful that the Biblical personalities never crossed the line of cohabiting with one's mother or daughter. Although we read of Lot's two daughters who did so, even in their case, it was not for lustful reasons.) Being purely objective, what is so much more "insolent" (as he put it), when man sleeps with his mother or daughter, over the sleeping with his sister? What does "inculcating chastity into our hearts" target as its goal?

Approaching an answer, we will also answer our original question: "Why are our parents' sisters, and the marriage to a woman and her daughter, alone, deserving the reference of "shi-air", close relative?" It is an interesting observation, and suspect it is an intentional parallel that Maimonides describes a "root and branch", while the Torah too singles out this "root and branch" relationship as an additional sexual deviation called "shi-air". Besides being close relatives, intercourse between parent and child, and also, intercourse with both; parent and child, carry an additional corruption. What is this additional corruption?

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I am not fully certain of Maimonides' complete intent, but I will offer some of my own thoughts, prodded by Maimonides' words: The tree creates the branch. The very existence of the branch would demand recognition by the branch, of a superior position that the tree holds, as the branch owes its entire existence to the tree. Therefore, one's act of procreation between the "branch and the tree", (the child and parent) denies the tree's significance. A false equality between the parent and child is also forged through such a union. The child does not recognize the institution that created him. He confuses what brought him into existence, with an object of pleasure - he confuses G-d's laws of procreation - his own mother - wherein his life was made possible, a life for wisdom, and mistakes that very institution as a sexual object - the opposite of man's true goal. Perhaps this is the "audacity" Maimonides refers to, when man does not maintain the correct position his parent holds, and is so submerged in his sexual desires, that his desires overshadow the normal relationship between parent and child. He is audacious towards G-d. And the reverse is also true, i.e., when a parent has intercourse with a child. Here, the parent is the cause of the harm we just mentioned above. Additionally, the parent corrupts his own view of a caretaker and guardian/teacher of his own child. Engaging in such relations, one allows the sexual to gain prominence over the true reality of G-d's plan for man. Instead of subduing one's emotions so as to allow one's metaphysical perfection to ensue, he inverts this equation, subduing the intelligence in favor of lusts. Sexual activity is thereby raised to an institutional status surpassing G-d's intended, spotlighted institutions of parents and children. The correct focus of life is gravely distorted.

The superior role of the parent is also seen in G-d's grouping of "Honor thy Parents" together with the first five of the Ten Commandments, addressing G-d. The latter five Commandments are between man and his fellow, where we would assume "Honor thy Parents" belongs. But G-d's placement in the first five Commandments between man and G-d teaches us that honoring parents is in fact a law, which targets the recognition of G-d. Through our acceptance of these two authority figures from youth, we learn to recognize "authority" in general, something essential for recognizing G-d. G-d's creation of a system of birth and parenthood is not accidental. Through such a system, G-d desired man learn the concept of "authority", to be later transferred onto G-d Himself.

Curbing our Desire

Maimonides concludes:

"...The reason why it is prohibited to cohabit with a menstrual woman (Lev. xviii. 19) or with another man's wife (ibid. 20), is obvious, and requires no further explanation.

It is well known that we must not indulge in any sensual enjoyment whatever with the persons included in the above prohibitions: we must not even look at them if we intend to derive pleasure there from. We have explained this in "the laws about forbidden sexual intercourse" (Laws of Forbidden Relations, xxi. 1-2), and shown that according to the Law we must not even

engage our thoughts with the act of cohabitation (ibid. 19) or irritate the organ of generation; and when we find ourselves unintentionally in a state of irritation, we must turn our mind to other thoughts, and reflect on some other thing till we are relieved. Our Sages (B.T. Kidd 30b), in their moral lessons, which give perfection to the virtuous, say as follows: "My son, if that monster meets you, drag it to the house of study. It will melt if it is of iron; it will break in pieces if it is of stone: as is said in Scripture, 'Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' " (Jer. xxiii. 29). The author of this saying thus exhorts his son to go to the house of study when he finds his organ of generation in an irritated state. By reading, disputing, asking, and listening to questions, the irritation will certainly cease. See how properly the term monster is employed, for that irritation is indeed like a monster. Not only religion teaches this lesson, the philosophers teach the same. I have already quoted verbatim the words of Aristotle. He says: "The sense of touch which is a disgrace to us, leads us to indulge in eating and sensuality," etc. He calls people degraded who seek carnal pleasures and devote themselves to gastronomy: he denounces in extenso their low and objectionable conduct, and ridicules them. This passage occurs in his Ethics and in his Rhetoric."

Ramban on Sexual Prohibitions

On verse 18:6, Ramban questions Maimonides' reasoning of prohibiting those who man is with regularly. Ramban states, "And what damage is there if man marries his daughter as was the practice of the children of Noah? Or marry two sisters as was done by our patriarch Jacob?" Ramban calls this a weak reason. Ramban openly states, "A person could not do better than to give his daughter in marriage to his elder son, and they would inherit his possessions and multiply and increase his house." In the end, Ramban states, "we have no reason for the tradition of forbidden relationships", but it has to do with the success of the seed, according to Ramban. He states that marriage between close relatives will not succeed in seed, which will prosper.

On verse 18:17, Ramban addresses one of our questions, that of "shi-air" and the term "zimah" - why the Torah uses this specific term in connection with a man who married a mother and her daughter, and one who married his father's sister. After demonstrating by example that "zimah" refers to "thought", Ramban states:

"In my opinion, Scripture states it is 'zimah', in the case [of sexual relationships with] a woman and her daughter, and also a woman and her mother; in order to condemn the matter, saying that when one lies with the one, who is his wife, he thinks of the other one on account of their relationship and likeness, and thus lying with both of them is a cause of lewdness in him."

"It is for this reason that Scripture states here that, 'the nakedness of a woman and her daughter etc.' and similarly it says, 'And if a man take with his wife also her mother, it is lewdness.'"

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"He states 'shi-air' meaning to say that they are also forbidden because they are near of flesh to each other, and lying with both of them would be lewdness, as I have explained. Similarly, Scripture states, 'and each that has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law' meaning that he defiled her to her husband, because even when she will be with her husband, she will think of his father because of their likeness."

Ramban introduces a new facet to the corruption contained in the sexual acts prohibited by the Torah. What is this "thinking of the other because of their likeness" which Ramban mentions twice? What is wrong with such thoughts?

It is clear, until the decree of Rabbeinu Gershon to wed only one woman, man was permitted to wed more than one wife. (However, I will mention, quoting a Rabbi, that many of our Torah leaders wed only one wife. Those who had more, like Abraham and Jacob, did not wed more than one wife, without the consent of their first wife. This teaches a certain morality and perfection in the marriage to just one woman) According to Ramban,

marrying more than one woman was not a problem, as their was no similarity between two people, unless they were mother and daughter, or sisters. He thereby fine-tunes the exact union containing a specific problem. So what is the problem in marrying two people of similarity? What is problematic in "thinking of the other", as Ramban states? What is the "lewdness"?

It would appear that in such a marriage, to two siblings or two consecutive generations, that man is preoccupied with the "person" of his sexual activity. This is why he wants an "additional" instance of his first partner – he desires "two" of that person, and not one. He seeks to gratify an emotion of sexual lust, of "lewdness". The Rabbis agree: intercourse is to serve the purpose of procreation. So essential to sustaining humanity, it was made so pleasurable. But to chase the pleasure, is to be preoccupied with the means, and not the ends. When marrying two similar individuals, man attempts to gratify a means, the pleasurable component, and not the procreative goal. However, when man used to marry two unrelated people, he was not in violation of this specific corruption. In this latter union, marriage to one did not promote the thinking of the other. This also assists in removing rivalry. ■

Witchcraft

In this week's parsha, Kedoshim, we read of the commands regarding Nichush and Onane; not to follow the heathen practices of setting signs, setting times as good or bad for our activities, or inquiring of fortune tellers and the like. An example of setting a sign would be if a person, whose food falls from his mouth says, "this is a sign not to leave the house, as I will be unsuccessful, or I will meet with a tricky individual". Another example is if a black cat crosses your path, and you therefore gauge your actions because of this event. Both are prohibited.

Why did the Torah group together, the setting of signs and the setting of times? Also, why is fortune telling and speaking to spirits grouped together, and why were these given the additional command "not to inquire"?

The flaw in these activities is the regression to the infantile state of insecurity. In such a state, one seeks security from the external world, instead of engaging one's own mind to determine which activities he should do. (Our article on Idolatry goes into detail of the basic definitions.)

The Torah's way of life is where man uses his mind to arrive at conclusions. He engages the world, determines his needs, and plans the best route. However, what these aforementioned individuals do, is abandon thinking, and look at coincidental phenomena as if they are "willed", and happening as a message; "This cat crossed my path, that must be a sign". "If I wear a red bendel, I will be protected". How foolish they are, and how contrary to G-d's plan. G-d endowed us with intelligence, to understand that He alone controls all, and to use to guide our own lives.

When describing those who believed in demons (Lev. 17:7), Ibn Ezra says, "Fools see demons." Meaning they are not real, but phantasms. Ibn Ezra says further, "Anyone who seeks them and believes in them, estranges himself from his G-d. Can one think that there is anyone that can do good or do bad except for G-d, the Honored and Awesome?" Ibn Ezra clearly states that there are no powers, only G-d. Besides G-d, man is the only other influence

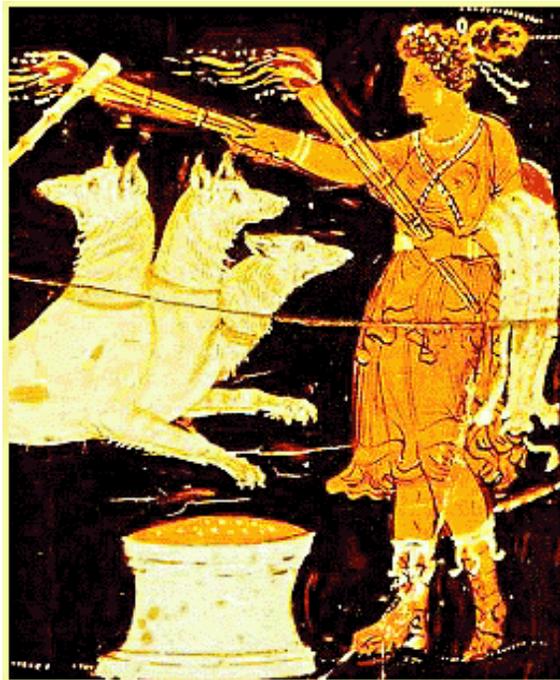
over his life.

With minimal reasoning, these prohibited practices of imagined security can easily be shown as fallacious. Ask someone, "Is a black cat knowledgeable? Does this stray cat recognize you? If it was a brown cat would you feel the same?" The answers to all these questions will be no, and the person should see his error. Again ask, "If the bendel was green, would it protect you? If it was half red and half blue? If you wore it on your head and not your wrist? If it was made of metal and not thread?" These questions will place the person in a position where he realizes he has no reasoning for his actions. It will then make sense to him to abandon such foolish practices. (See Tosephta Shabbos, Chap 7 for the prohibition against red bendels.)

To answer our initial questions, Nichush and Onane are attempts to establish a false sense security. One seeks assurance that his actions he will commence or abandon are the 'right' moves. Nichush and Onane are grouped together as the violator feels self sufficient to interpret events himself. However, fortune telling and speaking to spirits is a phenomena where one individual would seek counsel from another who feigned to be a mystical enchanter or warlock with "powers", or possessing connection with spirits. This expression of idolatry is where the seeker needs another person to assist. He is more infantile in that he cannot determine matters independently. He needs the psychological comfort of another who will direct him. This is also why we are forbidden to inquire, as this act of inquiring is the expression of a need for another, "guiding" human personality.

Torah commands man to utilize his intellect to realize the fallacy of these sins, and to live his life independently, abandoning the childhood need for security.

There are no powers, only G-d. This follows reason. G-d created everything. Nothing that can override His control of man's affairs. G-d also says that each man is punished for his sins, and rewarded for his good. This can only be true if man is free from all imagined "forces", alone to blame when he sins, and solely the cause of his good. Reward and punishment are true fundamentals of Judaism. If one deserves G-d's punishment, wearing a red bendel, or following other superstitions prohibited in our Torah, cannot stand in the way of G-d's punishment. Conversely if man does good, natural causes will be no opponent to G-d's rewards. ■



Molech Worship and Blood Eating

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Maimonides states ("Guide for the Perplexed", Book III, chapter XLVI, pg. 362 Dover ed.) that certain cultures who would either eat blood or sit around a pot of blood, as they felt they would be favored by "spirits". He writes:

"They imagined that in this manner the spirits would come to partake of the blood which was their food, whilst the idolaters were eating of the flesh; that love, brotherhood and friendship with the spirits were established because they dined with the latter, at one place and at the same time, that the spirits would appear to them in dreams, inform them of coming events, and be favorable to them."

After Maimonides explains the origin of the Torah prohibition against eating blood, he connects this prohibition to the prohibition to serve Molech, a fire G-d. (I will record a few sources in a moment which depict Molech's practice.) Maimonides continues:

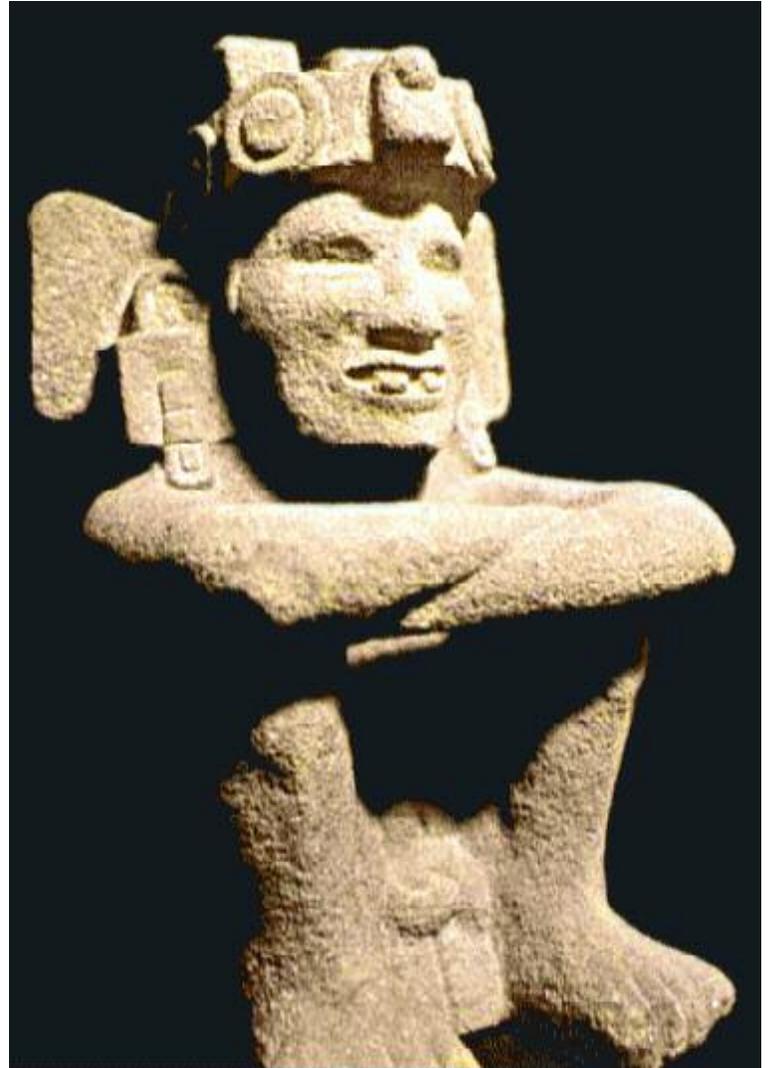
"...the law emphasized the prohibition (against blood eating) in the exactly in the same terms as it emphasizes idolatry. 'I will set My face against that soul that eats blood.' (Lev. 17:10). The same language is employed in reference to him 'who gives of his seed to Molech'; 'then I will set My face against that man.' (Lev. 20:5). There is, besides idolatry and eating blood, no other sin in reference to which these words are used. For the eating of blood leads to a kind of idolatry, to the worship of spirits."

Maimonides points to a connection between eating blood and Molech. His parallel is drawn from the Torah's own language, which is almost identical in both offenses, "I will set My face against that soul that eats blood", and, "then I will set My face against that man" regarding Molech. These two verses strengthen the equation of these two offenses. Maimonides also mentions the notion of "spirits", in application to both blood eating and Molech - a further equation.

Molech Worship

How exactly did one worship Molech? According to Maimonides, a parent would cause his child to pass through flames without burning the child. As he states, people felt this to be a "light thing", and by doing so, the imagined they were protecting their children. A "light thing" as he puts it means no risk. Followed by, "to protect their children" clearly indicates that Maimonides held Molech worship not to cause harm to the child. Ramban (Lev. 18:21) was of the opinion that parents would actually burn their children to the point of death. He bases this on many verses. He also equates Molech to the sacrificing of children to Baal, which he concludes are one and the same practice. He points out that the admonishment used by G-d in reference to such vicious abominations is, "(matters) that I have spoken not of, nor entered My mind." What is so significant about Molech and Baal that this sentiment is used by G-d?

What is the common denominator in these theories of Molech worship? What would both Maimonides and Ramban agree is the element which distinguishes



Molech from all other practices?

Why is Molech referred to more harshly than idolatry, "you defiled My sanctuary and profaned My name." (Lev. 20:3) And why is this prohibition followed immediately by prohibitions to divine spirits and enchanters?

On this point, the Talmud (Sanhedrin, 64a) teaches that Molech is in fact, not classical idolatry. It derives its proof from a previous Mishna on page 53a, where it lists Torah violators who are stoned. There, it includes "idolaters, one who gives his seed to Molech, ...". The talmud proves that had Molech been a classical form of idolatry, there would be no need to isolate it. It would be subsumed under the broader category of idolatry, as is done with regards to all

(continued on next page)

other forms of idolatry. But as the Mishna lists Molech separate from idolatry, the Rabbis conclude, Molech is not idolatry. So what is it? Furthermore, the Talmud asks, "Why is Molech called "Molech"? The answer according to one view is that "Molech means "that which rules; one violates the Torah through allowing anything to rule over him, even a pebble, even a chip of wood." This is significant, as idolatry usually has some fixed form, some unique structure for the idol. Here, the Talmud states that the worshiped form is irrelevant. And even though one might say, "are they not worshiping fire?" It might well be that they do burn their children in fire, but perhaps they do so, not TO the fire per se, but to an imagined deity. An intangible thing. Let's keep this last point in mind. The fact is that Ramban pointed out that both Molech and Baal incorporate child burning as their practice, so I would say that the fire was a means of worship, not the deity.

Blood Eating

What about the other practice which Maimonides equates to Molech, that of blood eating? How did one violate it? This seems very straight forward, based on Maimonides' description. People either ate blood, or dined around a pot of blood. Both practices were based on "dining with spirits". This fits in well with the verses which immediately precede the prohibition of blood eating. First, the Torah discusses prohibition to slaughter animals on the field: (Lev. 17:4-5) "And to the opening of the Tent of Meeting he did not bring to sacrifice offerings to G-d, before the tabernacle of G-d, ...he will be cut off from the midst of his people. In order that the Children of Israel bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the fields, and they bring them to G-d." Notice how in both verses the Jews are warned to bring their sacrifices to "G-d". This indicates that their crime is one where they are sacrificing to 'another' imagined entity. And two verses later, "And you shall not continue anymore your sacrifices to seirim (demons) that you err after,..." This proves that the sacrifices in the fields were intended for a recipient other than G-d. (Keep this in mind, as I believe this to be the underlying tie between blood eating and Molech.)

Now we find after these verses addressing sacrifice, the prohibition of eating blood. What does blood eating have to do with sacrifices to the "seirim", these demons? It would appear that the goal is one and the same, as both, sacrifices in fields (not to G-d's Tabernacle), and blood eating, were meant to approach spirits as Maimonides stated earlier. According to the Ibn Ezra, (Lev. 17:7) these spirits were seen only by fools, "mishugaim". They are not real, but imagined things. Maimonides says so well, "They sacrificed to spirits, not to G-d. According to the explanation of our Sages, 'lo eloha' (no to G-d) imply the following idea: They have not only not left off worshipping things in existence; they even worship imaginary things." (ibid, pg. 363)

To summarize, Molech and blood eating share in G-d's "setting of His face against that person." Molech is not considered classical idolatry, it is its own category. Maimonides mentions "spirit" numerous times when equating Molech with blood eating. Blood eating immediately follows the prohibitions of sacrificing to demons.

Two Crimes - One Flaw

I believe we already see the initial idea mentioned by Maimonides, that blood eating and Molech worship are uniquely different from other crimes. They alone deserve the response of "I will set My face against that man..." What is the crime they both share? I would formulate it as follows: "The assumption of forces other than G-d." Here is where these two crimes set themselves apart from idolatry. In classical idolatry, the worshiper does not deny G-d, but rather, he claims a certain sub-deity or practice is a method for relating to G-d. In regards to the Jews who bowed to the calf, the commentators say that no one thought the calf took them out of Egypt. Also, a Rabbi pointed out that Pharaoh accepted one G-d, but the method of worship was through sub-deities. So too the Prophet states, "Who would not fear you, King of the nations." (Jeremiah, 10:7) Idolatry does not include the denial of the One, true G-d. Rather, they deviate in their

approach to Him. However, blood eating and Molech worship have a different deviation; both assume a new thing called "spirits". These violators believe there may be G-d, but they definitely believe in other forces too.

We said that the Talmud teaches Molech to be any object one accepts to rule over himself. Meaning, it is not a physical object or statue, but a force, or spirit. Blood eating too was described by Maimonides as a wish that imagined spirits would be favorable to those worshipers who dined near the pot of blood. Here too, forces are imagined to exist in addition to G-d.

Now we understand G-d's response, "I will set My face against that man..." The only proper response to one who imagines other forces, is that G-d take the most severe action. How does G-d do so? The worshiper feels that by eating blood, or worshipping Molech, that his fortune will improve. This is his very motivation. But when G-d actually destroys his fortune, the worshiper must say to himself, "The Torah's words of destruction have come true, and my imagined forces are false, they have not saved me." The wording is that G-d will "set His face against that man". Meaning, there is only G-d, and no other. Nothing else can respond to his practices of blood eating or Molech worship, because there are no such things as spirits. The only Being Who can respond is G-d. The very misfortune teaches the violator that in fact, his actions are only witnessed by G-d, the only Witness to his actions. Nothing else is "out there", so nothing else responds.

Denying the exclusive reign G-d retains over the entire universe violates the central focus of Judaism. Therefore, one who violates G-d's unity deserves the most "focus" from G-d. G-d responds by saying, "I will turn aside from all My involvements, and I will concentrate on him." (Rashi, Lev., 17:10) A deviation of such proportion requires G-d's proportional "attention".

The phrase of G-d, "(matters) that I have spoken not of, nor entered My mind" is used in connection with Molech. Perhaps with this phrase, G-d wishes to indicate that Molech worshipers assumed forces outside of what is "real". Meaning, if this practice "did not enter G-d's mind", G-d means to teach that Molech is a practice unlike idolatry. It is a practice where one forges a false reality that G-d did not conceive of. Idolatry assumes the real G-d. Molech does not.

So Molech and blood eating are not idolatry. G-d plays no part in the goal of the violator. In idolatry, at least one is trying to approach the true G-d, but his methods are corrupt. But Molech and blood eating do not have G-d as their aim. They worship imagined "spirits", as Maimonides states repeatedly. The verses support this idea fully; "And to the opening of the Tent of Meeting he did not bring to bring sacrifices to G-d, before the tabernacle of G-d, ...he will be cut off from the midst of his people. In order that the Children of Israel bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the fields, and they bring them to G-d,..." The Jews are warned to bring their sacrifices to G-d, because it is here that they attempt to communicate with something other than G-d. This approach also explains why Molech is followed immediately by prohibitions of divining spirits and enchanters.

One question remains: If blood eating and Molech are so similar, what in Molech alone is deserving of the statement, "you defiled My sanctuary and profaned My name"? (Lev. 20:3) Think about it. Write in with your answers. □

Gershon M. Pincus D.D.S.

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