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Let Criticism Be Welcome

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered April 29, 1961)

It may come as a surprise to some of us that criticism is not only regarded as a virtue by Judaism, but is included as a full biblical commandment, one of the 613 mitzvot. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, hokheiach tokhiach et amitekha — thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin because of him” (Lev. 19:17). As long as a man is rational he will form opinions about his fellow men; and as long as his fellow men are human they will be imperfect. It is natural, therefore, that our judgment of each other sometimes be adverse. If we cannot and do not express these criticisms, then our neighbors will never know their own faults and we shall grow to dislike them more and more — in our hearts. It is better for them and for us that we express these criticisms and articulate the rebuke — hokheiach tokhiach — and thus prevent all of society from falling into sin.

Indeed, not only is criticism one of the important commandments, but it is one of the main functions of all religion. Torah was meant to serve as the spiritual leaven in the life of man and society. It was meant to raise us higher and higher. This it does by serving as our critic, by focusing the spotlight of attention on the distance between the ideal and the real, by revealing to us our imperfections and thus urging us to strive for the perfect.

Moses and Balaam were both prophets. They lived at the same time and preached to the same people of Israel. Moses was incisive, merciless in his criticism of his people, and caused them great unhappiness by making them painfully aware of their inadequacy. Balaam, the gentile prophet, spoke only kind words to them. He hailed them, complimented them, blessed them, flattered them. While Moses berated them as stubborn and corrupt. Balaam greeted them with Mah Tov — “how goodly are thy tents, O Jacob.” Yet Moses is the archetype of the nevi ha-emet,

the true prophet, while Balaam is the nevi ha-sheker, the prophet of falsehood. Moses who criticized is truly a prophet; Balaam who did not is merely a soothsayer — literally, he said soothing things calculated to put his happy listeners into moral slumber and spiritual stupor. At the time that Moses spoke our ancestors may have felt scandalized by his irritating remarks. Yet the judgment of history was reverence for the prophet and critic, and utter condemnation for the soothsayer and propagandist. Moses made of us a holy people. Balaam almost pushed us over the threshold of depraved immortality with the benot Moav, the daughters of Moab.

What Moses was to his generation, the Torah of Moses must be to every generation, including or even especially our own. When religion begins to do nothing more than tranquilize us, soothe us, and sanctify our status quo, it is no longer religion; it is then merely a shallow therapy for arm-chair psychiatrists. It is Balaam’s trade-mark. It is when religion fails to criticize that it deserves to be criticized itself — just as Balaam who should have criticized and did not was himself the object of criticism by — his chamor, his donkey!

That is why the pulpit too must be not only a source of inspiration and education, but even more so: criticism. It may occasionally be annoying, even irritating. But if our imperfections are hidden behind a veil of innocuous platitudes, then the voice of Torah has been silenced. The great talmudic teacher Abaye once remarked (Ketubot 105b) that if a rabbi is very much liked by the townspeople it is often not so much because of his superiority as because of the fact that he tactfully refrains from every kind of criticism!

When we insist, time and again, that Orthodoxy today must not be silent, we do not mean merely that it avail

itself of every channel of publicity just to mimic others and, so to speak, jump on the organizational bandwagon of other groups. Cooperate we must; but in all matters we must, on the basis of our Torah ideals, be critical and expose that which is non-Jewish and anti-Jewish. Whether it be a question of federal aid to Jewish day schools or a problem of synagogue architecture or a matter of kosher or non-kosher meals at the affairs of Jewish organizations, we must never be afraid to be respectfully critical. Hokheiach tokhiach et amitekha. As long as we regard our fellow Jew as amitekha, “thy friend,” we must not abstain from the mitzvah of criticism.

What is true for religion is true for democracy. A democracy cannot survive if there is no right of criticism. The freedom to criticize the government is what determines whether the government is a democracy or a dictatorship. The difference between a good democracy and a poor one is the extent to which the citizens avail themselves of this right. No nation, society, or people can live on a high moral plane if criticism is either absent or suppressed. That is why we American Jews should not consider it an act of treachery when one of us is critical of the State of Israel, provided it is done in the proper spirit. Nor should we be hypersensitive to some of the very justified criticisms leveled at American Jewry by our Israeli brothers. The Rabbis rightly declared (Shabbat 119b) that Jerusalem was destroyed because its citizens failed to exercise their duty to criticize one another.

Our Rabbis even ventured the idea that criticism has a place in domestic life. Kol ahavah she'ein imah tokhachah einah ahavah — a love which does not contain the element of criticism is not really love (Ber. R. 54:3). Love between husband and wife in which there is no recognition of each other's faults is static and must soon fade away. When love is not blind but critical, when there is an attempt, in the spirit of love, to improve each other, then that ahavah is dynamic, it leads to growth and development. But of course this is a tall order. The practice of tokhachah or criticism, in the spirit the Torah means it, is a most difficult art. It is so painful to be criticized, even for small things, especially when we realize that the reproach is justified! And it is even more difficult to reprove a friend in the proper manner, so that I cause him the least anguish and am most assured that the criticism will have a successful result: the correction of the mistake. How interesting that in an age far richer in greatness and nobility than ours,

the sainted Rabbi Tarphon remarked temihani im yesh ba-dor ha-zeh she-mekabel tokhachah — “I wonder if there is anyone left in this generation who knows how to take criticism” — and Rabbi Alazar ben Azariah answered temihani im yesh ba-dor ha-zeh she-yodeia le-hokhiach — “I would be more surprised to find someone left in this generation who knows how to give criticism” (Arakhin 16b). If my purpose in criticizing you is only that I seem bigger in comparison, that I sadistically needle you, then I am captious, not critical; then my remarks are an averah, not a mitzvah; for then I do not observe hokheiach tokhiach but rather violate ha-malbin pnei chavero, insulting another human being. True criticism, said the philosopher poet Yehudah Halevi (Kuzari 5:20), is such that you must reprove with intent to improve — in other words: teshuvah, repentance, or religious and moral growth, must be the goal of criticism. And this noble aim of hokheiach tokhiach can be achieved only if it is given in a spirit of profound friendship, in love, in loyalty; the object of the reproof must be amitekha, your dear friend, and you must give it so that he remains your friend. The Talmud (San. 101b) maintains that Jerobaam, the idol-worshipping king who split Jewry into two nations, was rewarded with the crown mipnei she-hokhiach et Shelomoh, because he had the courage to criticize King Solomon. And why was he ultimately punished? — mipnei she-hokhicho be'rabbim, because he reproached him publicly and thereby embarrassed him! Great is the man who can accept criticism. Greater yet is he who welcomes it. But greatest of all is he who knows how to administer it in a spirit of love and sensitivity, without causing pain and chagrin.

One last point, the most important, remains to be made. Until now we have spoken of the criticism of others. Yet this is only the prelude to the most difficult art — criticism of one's self. How does one go about reproaching himself? The great Baal Shem Tov taught that you arrive at self-criticism through your criticism of others. That is how he explains the well known Mishnah that Eizehu chakham? — ha-lomed mi-kol adam, “who is wise? — he who learns from every man.” When you look into a mirror, the Baal Shem tells us, you see all your own faults and deficiencies — the shape of your nose, the complexion of your skin, the size of your teeth. So when you look at your fellow man and notice his faults, treat him as a mirror, and recognize in him your own faults. For it is a part of human nature that you see only those defects in a friend which you yourself

possess to a greater or lesser degree. He who has a slight tendency to depart from the truth will be quick to detect the same characteristic in another. The same holds true for the inclination to take that which belongs to another, or immorality, or bragging, or any other vice. Our own faults sensitize us to them in others. The wise man is he who learns from every other man — he sees their failings and then knows he has them himself and proceeds to correct them. He holds up the personality of his friend as a mirror of his own. Criticism of others, if undertaken in the Torah spirit, leads to self-criticism. Perhaps that is why the Torah uses the double verb, for greater emphasis — not only *hokheieach*, criticism of others, but *tokhiach*, reproach of yourself. Interestingly, the word *hokheieach* is from the same root as the word *vikuach*, a debate or dialogue. For when I criticize my friend, even if he does not say a word, he is the mirror of my own faults, and I am automatically, through him, criticizing myself. *Hokheieach tokhiach* is a two-way street.

Now I Know the World Was Made for Me

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

As mentioned in our netvort to this parsha last year, the midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah*, 24) says that parshas *Kedoshim* presents us with a restatement of the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, albeit with some significant divergences from the first version. For example, in parshas *Yisro*, we are told to honor our parents, and in parshas *Kedoshim* we are told to fear them. In both cases, however, the commandment regarding parents is juxtaposed to a command to observe *Shabbos*. Apparently, there is some connection between *Shabbos* observance and filio-piety. Our remarks will be directed toward discovering what that connection may be.

The author of the medieval work *Sefer HaChinuch* writes that the rationale behind the obligation to honor one's parents is gratitude to them for having brought him into this world and taken care of his needs as he was growing up. Rabbi Chaim Elazari, z'l, of Canton, Ohio, points out that this rationale is fine for someone who is happy with his life situation. Many people, however, are not happy with their station in life, and often feel that perhaps it would have been better had they not been born. For example, Mark Twain, who underwent many hardships in his life, wrote in his autobiography that his aunt once

We Jews have had this quality of self-criticism in abundance. It is evident in our national sense of humor, so often turned inwards. It is evident in the writings of our Prophets, who stung us with their pointed barbs. It is evident in the thorough way in which the Talmud exposes the least error of a Moses or a David. It is evident in the remarkable fact that, after having been driven out of our homeland by people no better than us — probably far worse — we said “we deserved it” — *u-mipnei chateinu galinu me'artzenu ...*”

Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place? — He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not taken My name in vain nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the G-d of his salvation” (Ps. 24:3-5).

How are hands cleaned and hearts purified? — With the soap of criticism and the scouring powder of self-criticism.

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

saved him from drowning, and he never forgave her for it! Moreover, many people feel, rightly or wrongly, that their parents were in some way inadequate for their needs, and that they were therefore not given the opportunities in life that they should have received. How can we expect such people to have a feeling of gratitude to their parents for bringing them into the world? It is for this reason, writes Rabbi Elazari, that the obligation to observe *Shabbos* is mentioned immediately before the obligations to honor and fear one's parents. Observance of *Shabbos* is grounded in the belief that God created the world. Since God is good, and desires to benefit His creations, the world He created is good, and, therefore, a person needs to be grateful to his parents for bringing him into that world. While this explanation is certainly reasonable, I would like to offer a somewhat modified version of it to explain the connection between *Shabbos* observance and the obligations we have toward our parents.

The Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* tells us that man was created as a single individual to teach us that though God creates each individual in the form of the original Adam, no two people are exactly alike. Therefore, concludes the Mishnah, everyone is obligated to say that the world was created for

him. The idea being expressed here is that every person has a distinct mission in life that only he can fulfill, and so, in a sense, the word really was created for him, so that he can fulfill that mission. This perspective gives added meaning to our observance of Shabbos. When we acknowledge God as the Creator of the universe, we are also saying that He created our particular world, in which we must accomplish our particular mission, a mission that no one else at any time in history could have fulfilled. Once a person realizes and accepts this, he will be grateful to his parents for having brought him into this world. He will also understand that those parents are precisely the parents he needed to raise him and prepare him to fulfill his unique task in life. Hence, he will not feel that he was deprived of any opportunities that he needed because his parents were not the kind of people he would have liked to have been born to. With this perspective in mind, we can readily understand why the verses commanding us to honor and fear our parents are preceded by a command to observe the Shabbos and thereby recognize that God created the world, or, more properly, our specific world.

Cursing the Deaf

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel)

The Torah says in our Parsha: *Lo sekalel cheiresh*—you are not allowed to curse a deaf person. It doesn't mean someone who is *davka* deaf. Ramban comments on the spot: If you are not allowed to curse a deaf person who is not bothered by the curse because he doesn't hear it, then certainly you are not allowed to curse a person who can hear you loud and clear. It just brings up a question. I understand why I am not allowed to curse a well-hearing person. It's because he will become insulted, angry, and upset. But I could think: What's so bad about cursing a deaf person? It doesn't affect him. He does not get hurt because he doesn't hear the curses. So Sefer ha-Chinuch deals with this, and he says that it might hurt him—perhaps he will be affected socially when the bystanders who heard you curse him will start to disrespect him, and he will be humiliated by this behavior. However, Sefer ha-Chinuch's main pashat is that cursing referred to in the Torah is not about using the four-letter words. Cursing means pronouncing a literal curse—that something horrible should happen to someone. Because maybe on a metaphysical level, your curse will affect

Our understanding of the roles played by our parents in our lives will help explain an otherwise difficult opinion expressed by Rabbi Avraham Danzig in his halachic compendium, *Chayei Adam*. Rabbi Danzig writes that, as part of the obligation of honoring one's parents, a person must consider his parents to be great, honorable people, even if nobody else feels that way about them. How can one be obligated to believe something about his parent that is not acknowledged by anyone else? Must he then deny reality? In light of our explanation, however, this ruling makes perfect sense, because, in terms of the person's mission in life, his parents really are the greatest people in the world, because only they can provide him with the capacity to fulfill that mission. As Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, z'l, once put it, the obligation to honor one's parents entails viewing one's aging father or mother, residing in a nursing home and confined to a bed, unable to care for the most basic of bodily needs, as responsible for everything he ever accomplished. God, as the Creator of our personal world, provides each of us with the parents we need to prepare us for our role in that world.

this deaf person. He will not get upset from hearing the curse, but maybe, it will come true and hurt him that way. And *kol she-kein*, a well-hearing person, will be upset when he hears this curse. However, the Rambam takes an entirely different approach. Rambam says: *Ein chahchi nami*. The *chiddush* of the Torah is exactly what it says: Don't curse the deaf person even if it will not have any negative effect on him—it will not cause social problems and humiliation. And nevertheless, the Torah tells you not to curse the deaf person. Why? So Rambam explains that the problem with treating people the wrong way, disrespecting them, fighting, and having a negative attitude is not just its effect on the other person but how it affects you. He says: That's exactly what the Torah is telling you. Don't curse a well-hearing person because it will hurt him. But more than that, if you don't do it, you will avoid harmful consequences that you would otherwise experience. Because when you get angry and curse people, you train yourself in bad *midos* and learn to think negatively about people and look down on them. And that has a negative *hashpa'a* on your *neshama*. It makes you a bad

person and hurts you in the end. And ultimately, Rambam says, the Torah specifically chose *Lo sekale cheiresh* to teach us that when we behave improperly, we are not only hurting other people, but we are hurting ourselves as well. And therefore, before we act, we should think what kind of

person does it make us, besides the influence it will have on other people. And we should realize that we are a product of our actions and our speech. And we should strive to become refined, kind, and sensitive people and not, *chas ve-shalom*, the opposite. *Shabbat Shalom*.

What Does it Mean to be Holy?

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

What exactly is the meaning of the command, *קדושים תהיו* – that we are to be “sacred” people?

The Sanctity of Selflessness

Rav Shimon Shkop explains this command based on the Midrash’s puzzling interpretation of the phrase, *קדוש*, *כי קדוש אני ה’* – “for I, Hashem your God, are sacred.” The Midrash comments that we might have assumed that the imperative of *קדושים תהיו* requires us to be sacred *כמוני*, like God Himself. God therefore clarified, *כי קדוש אני ה’* – *אלוקיכם* – which the Midrash understands to mean, *קדושותי* – “My sanctity is beyond your sanctity.” Surprisingly, the Midrash thought that we might have assumed that we are to be “sacred” the same way God is sacred, and so God clarifies in this pasuk that His level of sanctity is unattainable by us mortals.

How is this possible? Why would anyone have entertained such a notion, that we can be as holy as Hashem Himself?

Rav Shimon explains that *קדושים תהיו* requires us to be *מוקדשים לטובת כלל* – devoted to the wellbeing of the public. *Kedusha* in this context, Rav Shimon writes, means to live as a giver rather than a taker, to be selfless instead of selfish. Ego and narcissism are the antithesis of holiness. *קדושים תהיו* means overcoming our ego and personal desires, to care about the wellbeing of others, to extend beyond ourselves. This is why the ensuing pesukim in this parsha deal mainly with interpersonal relations, presenting mitzvos such as *tzedaka* and refraining from things like revenge and gossip. This is what *קדושים תהיו* means.

Rav Shimon explains the Midrash as clarifying that we can never be as selfless and altruistic as God. His creation of the world, and His ongoing maintenance of the world, is pristinely selfless. God lacks nothing; there is absolutely nothing that He needs or can receive from anyone. His kindness, therefore, is perfectly selfless. Human selflessness, however, is never purely altruistic. There will always be at least a tinge of personal interest

involved. Modern psychology has confirmed that giving and extending oneself for others brings a person joy and satisfaction, and in fact, volunteering is recommended as a method of treating depression. This, Rav Shimon explains, is the meaning of *קדושותכם* – God’s selflessness is qualitatively different than ours, as His kindness is purely altruistic, whereas ours will always involve a degree of personal joy and satisfaction which we experience through giving.

Carrying Ourselves With Distinction

Rav Isaac Sher explains the command of *קדושים תהיו* by noting the mitzva presented later in Sefer Vayikra (21:8) to treat the kohanim with special respect: *קדוש יהיה*...*וקדשתו*. The term *קדוש* in that context, Rav Sher notes, refers to *חשיבות* – importance and distinction. We are to treat a kohen as a distinguished person, an important figure. By the same token, the mitzva of *קדושים תהיו* requires us to carry ourselves with distinction, to act like important people. We are to take ourselves seriously, to recognize that we are distinguished people, and to act in an especially dignified manner as befitting the *קדוש*.

Earlier in Sefer Vayikra (11:44), the Torah commands, *והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים*, which the Gemara (Berachos 53b) understands as an allusion to the obligations of *מים ראשונים* – washing one’s hands before eating – and *מים אחרונים* – washing one’s hands after eating. Indeed, hygiene is part of *קדושה*. Being a person of distinction means being dignified. The yeshiva of Slabodka had a tailor on staff to ensure that the students were all properly dressed. A talmid who was missing a button was not allowed in the *beis midrash*. This, Rav Sher explains, is what *קדושים תהיו* means – conducting ourselves with distinction, as important people, in an especially refined, dignified manner.

Being Ready for a Mitzva

The Chida writes that he once saw a handwritten manuscript of one the lesser known Rishonim – *Rabbeinu*

Efrayim – explaining the command of קדושים תהיו to mean that we must always be מזומנים – ready and prepared to seize every mitzva opportunity. In Sefer Bamidbar (11:18), we read that Moshe was instructed to tell the people, התקדשו למחר – to prepare for the next day. The word קדושה, then, can mean preparedness. Rabbeinu Efrayim thus explained קדושים תהיו as an obligation to be ready and prepared at all times.

Many of us remember our days in Little League, when kids playing the field would occasionally daydream, their minds wandering, and were wholly unprepared when the ball was hit towards them. The coaches would tell the fielders to always be ready and alert, to crouch down with their gloves open, staring intently on the batter to be prepared to field the ball if it came their way.

קדושים תהיו requires that we approach life this way – like a shortstop ready to field a hard-hit ball. We are to be mindful, alert, ready to jump on any mitzva opportunity that comes our way. We never know when we will suddenly find a lost object that needs to be returned, or be approached by somebody in need of a favor. We must always be מזומנים, ready to seize every opportunity to perform a mitzva.

בצדק תשפוט עמיתך – Judging Favorably

Parshas Kedoshim includes the mitzva of תשפוט עמיתך (19:15), which Rashi, citing from Chazal, explains to mean להיות לך את חברך לזכות – that we are to judge our fellow favorably.

The Gemara teaches in Masseches Shabbos (127b), הדן חברו לך לזכות – one who judges his fellow favorably is rewarded by being judged favorably by Hashem.

This teaching, at first glance, seems very difficult to understand. Judging people favorably means giving them the benefit of the doubt, realizing that we do not have all the information about what somebody did. Rather than assume the worst about something we witnessed somebody do, we should instead consider that there are facts of which we are unaware that justify the act

committed. But this is possible only because we are very limited, and do not have all the information. We can give the benefit of the doubt only because there is a doubt, there are facts which we simply do not know. But how can this possibly be relevant to God? How can the Gemara speak of God judging a person favorably in reward for his judging others favorably? He knows everything; no information is concealed from Him. How, then, can Hashem be לך לזכות?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in Megeg Yosef, explains that people are exceedingly complex. There is so much that contributes to the way a person acts. Everyone is carrying baggage, has certain genetic predispositions, and has had experiences which affect him in one way or another. We recite in the stirring תפילה זכה prayer before Yom Kippur:

גלוי וידוע לפניך שלא נתכוונתי בכל החטאים והעוונות להכעיסך ולמרוד כנגדך, אך הלכתי בעצת יצרי הרע אשר תמיד בכל יום פורש רשת לרגלי ללכדני.

It is revealed and known to You that I did not intend through these sins and iniquities to anger You and rebel against You, but I followed the counsel of my evil inclination, which always, each day, sets a trap for my feet, to ensnare me.

In essence, we are telling Hashem, “You know what I’m going through. You know how hard this is. You know my struggles. You know what I’m dealing with. You know all about my pressures, my fears, my anxieties. Externally, I’m guilty as charged; but internally, I am struggling, so please judge me favorably.”

Every person is waging a battle that we know nothing about. Everyone is struggling with something. This, Rav Sorotzkin explains, is what להיות לך את חברך לזכות means. It requires us to recognize that people are facing pressures and hardships of which we are entirely unaware, and which warrant a more favorable outlook on their behavior. The Gemara teaches that if we look upon others in this way, acknowledging their struggles, then Hashem will look upon us with this same degree of compassion and sensitivity, and judge us mercifully.

Seek Reasons, But Keep Mitzvot Anyway

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

You shall keep My laws (*chukotai*) and My rules (*mishpatai*) and do them, I am G-d.” (Vayikra 19:37) A midrash (Sifra, Kedoshim 8:11) explains

that this verse is making an equation between the two types of mitzvot mentioned. *Mishpatim* are the mitzvot whose reasons seem obvious. *Chukim* are mitzvot that we

his mother and father, and my Sabbaths you shall guard, I am Hashem, your G-d (Vayikra 19:1-3).

Rashi (v.3) teaches us that to revere one's parent is: not to sit in his seat, not to speak in his place, and not to contradict his words. To honor one's parent is to feed him, give drink, dressing and putting on his shoes, escorting him in and escorting him out.

While one is naturally inclined to honor the mother more than the father, and revere the father more than the mother, the Torah cautions us that both the mother and father must be equally respected and equally revered (Rashi to v.3).

So important is this area of avodas Hashem, that it has a prominent place as the fifth of the Aseres Ha'Dibros (the Ten Commandments), where the Torah dictates: כְּבֹד אֶת-אֲמִיךָ וְאֶת-אֲבִיךָ, - Honor thy father and thy mother (Shemos 20:11 and Devarim 5:15).

And so, the parsha that commands us regarding matters of holiness - kedoshim ti'hi'yu! - opens by exhorting us to revere, and honor, our mother and father. When one honors and reveres his earthly father, he will come to honor and revere his Heavenly Father, Who provides and sustains us with each and every need and Who is the Ultimate Giver of all that we have!

In their sefer, "Honor Them, Revere Them" (Artsroll), R' Zechariah Wallerstein z"l, and yblc"t R' Shimon Finkelman, share the following powerful, novel Torah insight:

When Yaakov came in to get the brachos from his father Yitzchak, dressed in the hunting garments of his brother Eisav, the pasuk tells us: וַיִּנְשֵׁךְ לֹו, וַיִּרַח אֶת-רִיחַ בְּגָדָיו, וַיִּבְרַךְ אֹתוֹ - And he (Yitzchak) drew Yaakov close and kissed him; he smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him; he said, 'See the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of the field that Hashem has blessed' (Bereishis 27:27).

Rashi comments that the hair of a goat's skin, which Yaakov was wearing on his hands and neck so that Yitzchak would think he was Eisav, normally emit an offensive odor. However, when Yaakov entered the room, he was accompanied by the fragrant scent of Gan Eden - "the field that Hashem has blessed".

Rav Shimon Schwab explains that the mitzvah of kibbud av that Yaakov was fulfilling at this time (by serving his father food) is what imbued his garments with the scent of Gan Eden. Why, specifically, did the mitzvah of kibbud av

elicit a scent of Gan Eden?

"Adam and Chava were placed in Gan Eden לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ, to work it and to guard it (Bereishis 2:15), which Chazal interpret to mean to perform positive commandments (לְעִבְדָּהּ - to work it), and refrain from transgressing negative commandments (וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ, and to guard it). When Adam and Isha partook of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad, writes the Zohar, they impaired for all time the spiritual effect in Heaven of the mitzvos that mankind would perform.

"However, their sin affected only those mitzvos which they potentially could fulfill at that time. Since Adam and Isha did not have parents, kibbud av va'eim was not part of their avodas Hashem. Therefore, their sin did not affect the spiritual impact of this mitzvah!"

With this unique chiddush and perspective, we can now understand why Yaakov emitted the scent of Gan Eden when he entered to serve food to his father. As kibbud av va'eim was not affected by the first sin, it was this mitzvah specifically that carried the pure and untainted scent of Gan Eden along with it (Honor Them, Revere Them, Artsroll Mesorah, p.86-87).

Later in the parsha, we are commanded: מִפְּנֵי שִׂיבָה תִּקְוִים, וְהִדְרִיתָ פְּנֵי זָקֵן - before a hoary head you shall rise, and glorify the face of an elderly person, and you shall fear your G-d, I am Hashem (Vayikra, 19:32). Unlike other cultures and societies, the Torah way of life is that we honor our parents, and our elders. We understand that they are one link closer to Matan Torah, while we are one degree more removed than they are.

R' Wallerstein z"l, and R' Finkleman shlita, relate the following vignette: "The Chazon Ish visited his mother every day. One day, he did not feel well, and therefore did not pay her his usual visit. Rav Chaim Kanievsky, who was a child then, was at his grandmother's house the next day (R' Chaim's mother was a sister to the Chazon Ish) and he heard her say, 'I wonder why Avraham Yeshayah did not come yesterday.' The young Rav Chaim went home and repeated to his uncle, the Chazon Ish, what he overheard. Immediately, the Chazon Ish grabbed his hat and jacket and started running to his mother's apartment. Rav Chaim recalled, "I could not catch up with him, no matter how hard I tried. He ran because of kibbud av va'eim, because his mother was worried" (Honor Them, Revere Them, p.25).

May indeed, we be worthy to live lives of Kedoshim Tihyu - You shall be holy - in all realms of avodas Hashem.

Giving Proper Reproof

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Kedoshim, we encounter the well-known Biblical dictum, recorded in Leviticus 19:17: הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת בְּלִבְךָ, הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת לִבְךָ, וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חַטָּא, *You shall not hate your brother in your heart. Reprove your neighbor and bear no guilt because of him.*

As opposed to most other legal codes, the Torah is concerned not only with people's actions, but also with their attitudes. Wrong feelings, as well as wrong acts, can be very destructive, and bottled-up resentment may lead to great harm. Consequently, the Torah instructs us to "reprove" our neighbors. If one has a justified complaint, do not brood over it. It is far better to state it, and confront it, forthrightly.

At first blush, this positive Torah commandment seems to justify much of the prevailing contemporary attitude—if one has a complaint, speak up, get it out of your system, sock it to him, tell the creep off, blast the perp between the eyes. And yet, as we study the laws governing proper reproof, we see that this is far from the Torah's intent or practice. In fact, our sages declare that anyone who embarrasses another person publicly loses his portion in the World to Come (Avot 3:15).

Furthermore, based on an allusion in the Sifra, Rashi explains that proper reproof means, "rebuke him, but do not shame him publicly." The Rabbis say, with extraordinary insight, that just as it is a mitzvah to say things that are heard, so is it a mitzvah not to say things that will not be listened to (Yevamot 65b). If we know that the person whom we wish to reprove cannot or will not hear what we are saying, it is preferable to avoid reproof, since doing so will only engender greater strife and enmity.

Both the English word "reproof" and the Hebrew word תּוֹכַחָה —"to'cha'cha" underscore that the purpose of reproof is to "prove" to the perpetrators that what they have done is wrong and encourage them to mend their ways. The point of reproof is not to tell the person off, but to enlighten the sinful or mistaken person so that he/she understands that such behavior is not acceptable. There should be no element of vengeance in reproof, since it is an issue of education and enlightenment. But, of course, not everyone wishes to be, or can be, enlightened, and not everyone can hear reproof. Consequently, the Torah

instructs those who wish to give reproof to be extremely careful and extraordinarily gentle.

Jewish tradition provides insightful guidelines for those who wish to admonish others. The person who gives reproof must be certain that he or she is not guilty of the same or a similar improper behavior. As the Talmud says (Baba Bathra 60b), קַשׁוּט עֲצֵמְךָ, —improve yourself before you improve others.

The Talmud in Baba Bathra records an insightful story concerning the sage, Rabbi Yannai, who owned a tree whose branches overhung the public thoroughfare. One day, a case came before him regarding a person who owned a tree that similarly hovered over public property, and the public demanded that it be removed. After hearing the complaint, R' Yannai instructed the litigants to return the next day, at which time he would render judgment. In the meantime, R' Yannai had his own tree cut down.

The very next day, R' Yannai told the owner of the tree that his tree must be cut down because its presence prevents travelers from comfortably traversing the thoroughfare. The owner of the tree protested to R' Yannai, "But you too have a similar tree, which blocks the public domain." R' Yannai then told him, "Come and see that my tree is cut down, and you will have to cut yours as well."

The rabbis ask why R' Yannai had not previously cut down his tree, instead of doing so only when the similar case was presented to him. They answer that R' Yannai was under the impression that the public benefitted from the shade that was given off by his tree. But when he learned that the public was hindered by the tree's presence, he had it removed. Clearly, a person may not reprove a neighbor if he himself has a similar shortcoming.

Remarkably, our rabbis teach that the mitzvah of תּוֹכַחָה—to'cha'cha means much more than mere reproof. In Shabbat 54b, the Talmud cites the case of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, whose cow would go out on Shabbat with a forbidden rein between her horns. The rabbis explain that the cow did not really belong to R' Elazar ben Azaria, but since R' Elazar did not reprove his neighbor who was the actual owner, it was considered as if he had committed the violation. Tradition teaches that anyone who has the opportunity to protest against a wrongdoing, but fails to do so, is considered as if he had personally committed the

violation.

Our rabbis declare that the concept of עֲרַבְנוּ—a'ray'vut—that all of Israel is responsible for one another, is much more than a mere pithy slogan. Indeed, it has profound legal implications! Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik, in his brilliant essay, “Jew and Jew, Jew and Non-Jew” states that if a Jew observes the Sabbath fully, but has an opportunity to share the Shabbat with another, less-observant Jew, and fails to do so, then the Shabbat of the observant Jew is incomplete. Similarly, if a Jew has an opportunity to share his Shabbat קִדּוּשׁ—kiddush, over wine, with another Jew who would otherwise not make kiddush, but fails to do so, then the kiddush that was made is deemed incomplete.

To what extent must one reprove one's neighbor? R' Elazar says, “Continue to reprove him until he strikes you.” Rabbi Joshua says, “Until he curses you.” Ben Azai says,

“Until he insults you.” (Talmud, Arachin 16b).

The Talmud (Yoma 9b) declares, that the Second Temple was destroyed because of שִׂנְאָת חִנָּם—sinat chinam, wanton and baseless hatred. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook has written, “If we have been destroyed and the world together with us has been destroyed—because of baseless hatred, it can be rebuilt, and the world can be rebuilt as well—because of baseless, undeserved love.”

The Chazon Ish declared that since we no longer know how to give proper reproof, it is preferable not to offer reproof.

While we may not know how to offer proper reproof, no one can say that we no longer know how to offer love, especially baseless, undeserved love. Let us determine to rebuild the world by embracing others with abundant, yes undeserved, love.

Long Lasting Love

Mrs. Shira Smiles (Adapted by Channie Koplowitz Stein)

One of the most famous quotes from the Torah is, “Ve'ahavta lere'acha kamo'cha/Love thy neighbor (peer/friend) as yourself.” What is seldom included is both the first part of the verse and the conclusion: “You shall not take revenge, you shall not bear a grudge... I am Hashem.” Interestingly, several other mitzvot in this section relating to man's interaction with his fellowman also end with, “I am Hashem.” Certainly there must be a deeper meaning to the repetition of this phrase than mere emphasis. Further, as the Ramban observes, it is humanly impossible to love your friend as you love yourself. Therefore, Ramban says, the Torah means that whatever [good] you wish for yourself, you should also wish for your friend.

However, the Torah's adding Ani Hashem precisely after these interpersonal mitzvot underscores Hillel's insistence that loving your fellowman is indeed the basic premise of the Torah upon which all else was built. As Rabbi Roberts points out, loving Hashem and loving mankind are interconnected and of equal importance. That is why, while the cherubim guarding the Ark of the Covenant faced each other, their wings tilted upward toward Heaven.

When Hashem first introduced Himself to Moshe at the burning bush, He introduced Himself with these same words, Ani Hashem, I am trustworthy and can be

counted on to reward the righteous and punish the evil ones judiciously. While we understand that reward and punishment in their truest sense refer to the world to come, how are we to understand them in this world, asks the Tosher Rebbe in Avodat Avodah. The Tosher Rebbe answers that while all good deeds are rewarded in the World to Come, your love and good deeds toward your fellow man have a positive impact in this world as well and serve as a model for others. Therefore, the reward is also built into this world. You have changed the reality of this world, and Hashem allows you to see the fruit of your labor.

In reality, writes Rabbi Egbi in Chochmat Hamatzpun, there is no distinction between the “social” mitzvot and the “spiritual” mitzvot. If you believe that Hashem is the Creator and nothing exists outside of Him, everything is about Hashem and part of one reality. We ourselves are a reflection of that all encompassing reality. Within this context, one avoids jealousy, understanding that Hashem has made and choreographed all the conditions of my life as well as those of my fellow man. There is no room for jealousy, the condition that prevents love. As Rabbi Miller reminds us, citing Rabbi Tzadok, love of God, love of Hashem and love of Torah must coexist, for Yisroel, Torah and Hakodosh Boruch are one chord with three strands. We are all beloved of Hashem, and our love of God is thus

reflected in our love of others and in our love of Torah, adds Rabbi Wolbe.

Rabbi Chaim Vital makes a beautiful observation that sharpens this idea and connects our love for each other with our love for Hashem. Ahavah is equal to 13. If two Jews treat each other with love, we are adding 13 and 13, equaling 26, the numerical equivalent of Hashem's ineffable name YKVK. [Perhaps we can also add that just as Hashem is Echad/One/Unique, also equal to 13, so each of us, created in His image, is unique. Again when we add two unique individuals together, we get a stronger presence of the truly Unique One Who loves us all. CKS] We are creating a greater manifestation of Hashem's presence in the world.

In a similar homiletic vein, The Mishchat Shemen writes that a Jew is called a "Yid", the Yiddish pronunciation of the letter "yud." When you find two "yidden" together as equals, side by side, you have God's name. Conversely, when you put one above the other with an egotistical bent, you've created a schwa, the sound of nothingness. Ani Hashem is integral to all the mitzvot, especially to those between man and his fellow man. Since nothing else exists without God, everything I do, whether in the social realm of chesed or the intellectual realm of Torah study, must lead me closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Although many mitzvot are dependent on loving others -- not stealing, not killing -- to actually love another as one loves oneself is impossible. After all, I know so many good things about myself, but I cannot know all the good things about another. Therefore, explains Rabbi Reiss in Meirosh Tzurim, Ani Hashem; if you shift your paradigm from the egocentric view of what you know to the Theocentric view from God's perspective, you will see in the other human being that same image of God imprinted in him as you see in yourself. Recognizing the godliness within each of us creates the connection and love between us all. All my interactions with others will then be informed by that recognition. Loving my fellowman is merely an extension of my love of God.

Even love of self should be a reflection of love of God, writes Rabbi Yitzchak Katz in Letitcha Elyon. My love of self should be based on the Godly soul within me rather than on my individual qualities, a soul that exists within each Jew and all together creates Knesset Yisroel/ Congregation of Israel unbroken from our beginning to eternity.

Hashem manifests His presence in the world through His attributes. Therefore when we mirror these attributes through our actions, we should recognize the Divine sparks of God emanating from within ourselves and from within others who are acting according to these attributes. Each of us may reflect a different spark. One may be highly sensitive to others, another may have great analytic intelligence, a third may be artistic while a fourth may be mechanically inclined. Perhaps the hardest, attribute may be the ability to maintain tremendous self control. Each of us has a spark of Godly attributes within ourselves. Sometimes we can learn some of the profoundest truths from a simple conversation with an ordinary Jew [or from a child, CKS], adds Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller.

The Talmud tells us that Yerushalayim was destroyed because Bnei Yisroel did not rebuke one another. Bnei Yisroel walked around like sheep, not looking at each other face to face to see the inner glow, but head checking out the back end of each other. Instead of seeing the good attributes of the other, admiring it and trying to emulate it, they noticed only the negative characteristics, leading to baseless hatred and destruction, writes Rabbi Svei. It is so much easier to be critical than to admire another. But just as God looks at us with loving eyes, so should we also observe each other with love.

There are two approaches to learning to love another human being that goes beyond obeying God's command to actually feeling the love. Rabbi Akiva famously uses the verse in our current discussion as the basic building block of this love. We should see our people as one unified body, each individual as another limb or organ of that total body. If we can achieve that unity, as we did when we stood at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, we will realize that we are to love each other and be responsible for each other just as we would feel love and responsibility toward each finger or toe of our own bodies. We would automatically love each other because the other is a part of me and symbolically a physical manifestation of God Himself.

Rav Azai takes a different approach. When the Torah goes into the details of the creation of Adam, the Torah writes, "This is the accounting of the descendants of Adam on the day that God created Man..." The Medrash says that during the process of creation, Hashem showed Adam all that would descend from him through all eternity, how each generation would find its leaders and

its ways of serving Hashem. The souls of every future human being was contained within the original Adam, and each has its mission of service toward Hashem as part of that body. It is the responsibility of each individual to respect and work toward maintaining his role in the account of the generations of Adam. It is only through our individual attributes that we can collectively properly serve Hashem, each generation having its own unique purpose in furthering Hashem's vision for mankind, to bring Godliness to the world. We cannot fully actualize that potential as individuals. We can only achieve that potential collectively, with each other.

We cannot live only for ourselves without regard for the well being of others. That would be like a passenger on a ship drilling a hole under his personal seat, not caring that the safety of everyone on the ship is interconnected.

The realization of our interconnectedness is nowhere more apparent than in the Shemoneh Esrei, the Silent Prayer in which we ask for so many blessings. Each of these requests is couched in the plural, for we do not request blessings only for ourselves, but for the entire body of Bnei Yisroel, writes Rabbi Weissblum in *Heorat Derech*. Our job is to build each other up so that we each have the confidence to serve Hashem to the best of our ability. The success or failure of one is a reflection of the success or failure of us all.

Rabbi Yoffe sums up the message of our verse beautifully: "Ve'ahavta lereiacha kamocha Ani Hashem, If you love your fellowman as yourself, then I am Hashem Who will love you as a reward for loving others.