

Three Kabbalists Define Love

Translations and Commentary by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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1. Rabbi Yosef Haim, Sefer Ben Ish Hai, Drashot - Kedoshim

“Do not take revenge, do not bear a grudge against a member of your people and you shall love your fellow like yourself, I am HaShem.”
(Lev. 19:18)

Now, many have wondered about this commandment. How can the Torah possibly command such a thing that is so unnatural? It is not natural for a man “to love his fellow” like himself. Indeed, our holy Sages have already taught that one’s life should take precedence over another’s. Thus, we see that their words are apparently in contradiction to the basic meaning of what this verse says.

We also need to ask, why does the verse specify, “a member of your people”? All the commandments of the Torah have to deal with the members of “your people” (i.e., fellow Jews) and not with members of another nation. Why then does the verse here specify this more than any other place?

It appears to me, with the help of Heaven that since the time that our holy Sages have revealed to us the secrets of reincarnation we can now see the clear and necessary reason why we should never hate one another, nor take revenge or hold a grudge.

For example, we have two men, Reuven and Shimon; they live distant from one another and are complete strangers to one another. They are not related and have no common family (even through marriage). Yet, in their previous lives they were related. They might have been brothers or even father and son. Therefore, if Shimon were to hate Reuven, who was his father or son in the past life, we find that he hates his own.

This is also true about women among whom we find those who show great animosity towards one another. It is possible that in the prior life the two who hate each other today were formally mother and daughter.

There was the case of one woman who very much hated her daughter in law. She hated her from the day she married her son and moved in with him. Every day and night she began fights with her, every moment she bickered with her until her daughter in law couldn’t take it any more. The daughter in law grew very despondent and would have chosen death over life with all the constant quarrels and bickering.

The reason why this woman hated her daughter in law so much was that she too had a very beautiful daughter whom she loved dearly as her own soul. Yet, 15 years before the marriage of her son, her precious daughter died. Her mother mourned her for years and would not forget her.

Now when her daughter in law came into the family her appearance was almost identical to her daughter who had died. The daughter in law had the same facial features, stature and beauty. Every time when the mother saw her daughter in law she remembered her dead daughter and thus hated the daughter in law even more and made her life miserable. How dare the daughter in law looking so much like her own daughter come into this family, as if in place of the dead daughter, the mother thought.

One night, the woman had a dream. She was a widow and her husband came to her in the dream and asked her, "how long are you going to continue making bitter the life of your daughter in law? Don't you know who she is? This is the one who everyday you used to hug and kiss."

She asked her husband in the dream, "Who are you talking about?" He responded, "this is your daughter who died 15 years before she became your daughter in law. On the day she died, your daughter in law was born; she is the reincarnation of your daughter. This is why she has such a similar appearance and similar mannerisms. Because you missed her so, Heaven showed mercy to you and ordained that your son would marry her. Your daughter in law is your long lost daughter; she has been given back to you. Moreover, you every day fight with her and make her life miserable. You are harming none other than your own daughter whom you love like your own soul."

The woman was struck with terror and fear. She began to strike herself due to her grief and cried out loud and awoke. It was all a dream.

When she awoke, she began to cry uncontrollably mourning now how she treated her daughter in law, who in truth is her own daughter. She rose out of bed and went to see her daughter in law. She went into her bedroom and fell before her feet and hugged and kissed her.

From that moment on she loved her daughter in law like her own soul, for she now knew that her own daughter had indeed been returned to her.

From this story, we have a lot to learn. One who has a brain in his head will understand now to distance him/herself from any type of hatred, revenge or grudge. For maybe the one who hate now used to be your son, father or brother? This again is also true with women. Being that we are all from the seed of Israel and we are one people, this is the way this may be. This is not applicable to other nations who were not commanded regarding this thing.

Thus it is written, "Do not take revenge, do not hold a grudge against "benei amekha" (literally - a child of your people). Do not read "amekha", but rather "imekha" (changing the vowel sound under the first letter changes the words from reading - a child of your people to - a child with you).

Being that he is a "child of your people"; it is possible that in a previous life he was a child of yours specifically, or a father or a brother. Although today one is a stranger, how can one take revenge or hold a grudge against one who once was your father, son or brother?

2. Rabbi Ya'aqob Abuhatzera, Sefer Pituhei Hotam - Parashat Kedoshim

“Do not be a tale bearer among your people, do not stand by when your fellows blood is being shed . . . Do not hate your brother in your heart.”
(Lev.19:16-17)

It is possible to infer from here that which we know that even a Tzadik (righteous person) should never act as an accuser to make accusation against the Jewish people. This is true even if they are all wicked (rashaim). For the Holy One, blessed be He has no desire for the one who brings accusations against Israel.

Who do we have that is greater than Moshe who referred to Israel saying, “a society of sinful people” (Num. 32:14) and HaShem considered him to have sinned, according to our Sages. Although Moshe Rabbeynu, upon him be peace, spoke the truth, nonetheless, HaShem has no desire for this.

We find the same thing with regards to Eliyahu who said, “for the Children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant” (1 Kings 19:10). Being that Israel are the “children” of the Eternal, the mouth that speaks accusations against them should rather pray for them and ask HaShem that they do teshuva (repent), similar to the example given in the Gemara. Therefore, it is good in HaShem’s Eyes to admonish the Jewish people and to pray for them that they return to the good path.

When the verse says, “do not be a tale bearer among your people” it means that one should not act as a slanderer or accuser between Israel and the Holy One, blessed be He and say, “look how many wicked and evil people live in this generation.” On the contrary, one should not cease to pray and request that they all repent. Maybe it will be your prayer that will bear fruit and because of it many might do teshuva (repent).

If you do not pray for the wicked and request mercy for them that they repent, in the end you will receive punishment because you want them to remain wicked. The wicked even while alive are considered as (spiritually) dead. When you do not request mercy for them that they repent, then you are accepting their state of (spiritual) death. More than this, when you do not request G-d’s mercy for the wicked, you cause death to come even closer to them, as it is written, “the years of the wicked will be shortened” (Prov. 10:27).

In light of above does the verse say, “do not stand by when your fellows blood is being shed” because you are able to save him by your prayers. The meaning of “do not stand” means, “do not be quiet.” Do not be silent of prayer.

The reason that would cause you to be silent is the hatred with which you hate the wicked. Although your hatred for the wicked is nothing personal, it is rather because the person himself is wicked and acts malevolently towards Heaven. Nonetheless, we are admonished “do not hate your brother in your heart” (Lev. 19:17). This is for the sake of the honor of HaShem’s Name. We must admonish the wicked again and again and “not bear a sin because of him” (Lev. 19:17).

We must not hand over the wicked for judgment rather we must pray for them that they do teshuva. We must admonish them, only in this way do we “not bear a sin because of him” (Lev. 19:17).

Regarding this does the prophet say, “and as for you, you will have saved your soul” (Ezek. 3:19).

3. Rabbi Haim Vital, Sefer Etz HaDa'at Tov - Parashat Kedoshim

“Do not hate your brother in your heart, you must certainly admonish your brother.”

(Lev. 19:17)

Apparently the simple meaning of the text which states “do not hate” means that one should not hate a fellow Jew in one’s heart because of the sins that one did to you. The reason why it is forbidden to hate is because he is your brother.

However, hatred that is for the sake of Heaven is acceptable, for example in the case where one witnessed another perform a certain sin. It is written, “for indeed those that hate you HaShem, I hate them and I quarrel with those who rise up against You” (Ps. 139:21).

Nonetheless, we are still required to admonish the sinner for what he/she has done. If that one still chooses not to do teshuva (repent), we are to admonish him/her again. This is the meaning of the words, “you must certainly admonish” (literally Hokheah Tokhiyah, admonish, you shall admonish), expressing a doubling. If after the second time the violator does not do teshuva (repent), it is a mitzvah to hate him/her. Only then will you “not bear a sin because of him” (Lev. 19:17). This is a warning not to hate one’s brother.

Commentary by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

This parasha covers so many different topics that it is nearly impossible to cover them all. Yet, I believe that the underlying current in all the mitzvot discussed here in Kedoshim revolve around the mitzvot *beyn Adam l’havero* (between man and man).

In this parasha we are commanded to observe what seems to be an impossible mitzvah, *“to be holy as HaShem is holy”* (Lev. 19:1). I understand Rashi’s commentary to this commandment as referring to the previous chapter’s prohibition against incestuous relationships. Yet, if even if one maintains absolute sexual purity one still does not achieve a level of holiness that can be compared to HaShem. There is obviously something more to Kedusha (holiness).

The parasha makes quick mention of the commandments to honor one’s parents, the prohibition against worshipping idols, gifts to the poor, honesty in business, forbidden mixtures of crops (kilayim) and materials for clothing (shatnez), not eating a fruit tree during its first four years, the forbiddance against sorcery, not to cut the corners off one’s hair or beard and on and on we can go. All these commandments must be interrelated, yet how they are is not initially clear. There is more here than meets the eye.

The point so eloquently made by the Ben Ish Hai in his story about the woman and her daughter in law is that not everything that we see is actually the real way things are. Psychologically speaking we know that there is a large part of the human mind unknown to us called the unconscious. We acknowledge it’s existence but have no idea as to what really exists in its depths. So too is this the case with the mitzvot of the Torah.

In Pirkei Avot (5:22, Kehati), Ben Bag-Bag says, *“Turn it (i.e., the Torah) and turn it again, for everything is in it.”* The holy Zohar states in numerous places that our Torah has such depth that no human mind will ever be able to grasp it all. As this is the case with the holy Torah, so is this the case with our everyday human lives. Like the Ben Ish Hai points out, a lot goes on that doesn’t make sense, at least not to us.

Now, religiously, as men and women of faith, we can accept in our minds that G-d is in control of all things and that whatever happens is in accordance to His Will. Yet, when we see horrible wars,

holocausts and the like, these prove to be a real test to people of faith. We know that to these too there is a reason and a purpose know to Heaven.

While no one Rav can fully detail the formula of life and explain the reasons underlying everything, nonetheless, we have been given the keys that unlock the doors of the secrets. The secret key is not a concept of knowledge, but rather a choice of actions.

When we observe the mitzvot of HaShem, properly and with true kavana (intentions of the heart), we activate an aspect of spirituality deep within the human soul, which resides in our unconscious. When we observe the mitzvot, even if initially for the wrong reasons (lo lishma), something deep within us is transformed and we become renewed. We become new people. Somehow the mitzvot transform our lives and personalities and we become better people.

This occurs not only due to the *mitzvot beyn Adam l'havero* (between man and man) but also due to our fulfilling the mitzvot of kilayim, shatnez and the like. We human beings are an integrate entity, all our separate parts (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual) all work together, influence one another and form a concentric whole.

As it is with the Jewish soul, so is it with the Torah. As apparently disconnected and variant the mitzvot appear, especially those grouped together in this week's parasha they, nonetheless, form one concentric whole. Thus, our connection to the whole of Torah brings to our souls their wholeness (i.e., completion). It is this wholeness (of Torah observance, little mitzvot alongside the big ones) that enables us to receive from HaShem His most precious gift - His Holiness.

The mitzvot *beyn Adam L'Makom* (between HaShem and man) are clearly outlined for us in the Shulkhan Arukh and the other codes. Yet, the mitzvot *beyn Adam l'havero* (between man and man) are sometimes a bit more complicated. While our *sifrei kodesh* outline for us how to implement the laws between man and man discussed in this week's parasha, nonetheless, as seen in the quoted sections from Rabbi Ya'aqob Abuhatzera and Rabbi Haim Vital, sometimes specific actions and applications become somewhat blurred. For example, when do we love our neighbor and when are we supposed to hate? Scripture demands both of us, yet are we able to differentiate within our psyches when each mitzvah, to love and to hate is to be fulfilled? This requires great wisdom on each of our parts; a wisdom that cannot be learned from books.

"I place (*Shiviti*) HaShem before me always, he is at my right hand, I shall not fall" (Ps. 16:8). The Ba'al Shem Tov in his Tzava'at HaRivash offers a very important understanding of this verse. The word "shiviti" is usually translated as "I place." The Ba'al Shem Tov translates it as "I balance," meaning that we should review each and every thing that we think, say and do and balance it in light of HaShem. We should ask ourselves, "does G-d want me to do this or that thing? Does such a thing give Kavod (honor) to His Name?" We need to learn how to talk to G-d and how to ask for His Guidance. Rabbi Nahman of Breslov wrote extensively on this topic.

Sometimes it is the right thing to stand up to immoral and non-religious Jewish individuals. Sometimes we must hate them for what they are doing. It is written, "everything has its season, there is a time for everything under the heavens . . . a time to love and a time to hate." (Ecc. 3:1,8). Nonetheless, as Rabbi Haim Vital points out, even such hatred must be for the sake of Heaven and to honor G-d's Name. Such hatred is not your run of the mill type unfortunately practiced today by religious and secular alike. Even when we must stand up against today's wicked and hostile secular interests, we must still seek out their welfare. We must always pray for their teshuva (repentance). We must not "own" our hatred of godless secularism; we must only "borrow" it from HaShem.

We must not stand idly by our brother's blood. We must love them as ourselves. This means that when "tough love" is necessary than that is what we must do. We must, however, keep our eyes on HaShem FIRST and FOREMOST. Anything less than this will lead us astray.

All the mitzvot together open us up to the holiness of HaShem. All the mitzvot of this parasha teach us how to be in balance with nature, our world and ourselves. The wisdom of this is inherent in the practice. The secular cannot know or see this. It is our job, as Torah faithful Jews, to love and to hate, both at the same time. There is no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked, but think how sweet a victory it would be if all the secular suddenly realized the error of their ways and returned to HaShem and embraced His Torah. IT CAN HAPPEN! All we need do is pray, and love and hate - all for the honor of HaShem's holy Name.

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