


**Parashat Tazriah-
Kedoshim**

English version

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THOU SHALT LOVE THY COMPETITOR

Rava said: When a person dies and is brought in for his final judgement, he is asked: were you faithful in your business dealings?" (Shabbat 31a) The test of business ethic is the biggest test on a Jew's fear of G-d. It has been said, "The bigger the merchant, the smaller the Jew!" What a shame! After all those years of Torah study, why is it so hard for the Jew to stick to the values and beliefs he was taught?

In his brilliant work, Emunah and Bitachon, the Chazon Ish describes the character of the faithful Jew. לא יחת אם רעהו פותח חנות, ישתדל עוד לעזור לרעהו, לתקנו בעצה טובה, לעשות עבורו, ולשקוד... על תקנתו. *He will not fret if his friend opens a competitive store. He will even apply effort in helping his "friend" by giving advice, helping with errands and making sure his competition does not make mistakes.* וכמה מן הקדושה מוסיף בעולם לראות איש עושה חסד עם המתעתד להתחרות עמו, ומוסיף תהילה ליריאו יתברך אשריו ואשרי דורו *And how much holiness does this man bring to the world?! To see a man doing kindness with his future competitor! And he adds praise to those who fear Him. Lucky is this man! And lucky is his generation!*

What is the secret of tapping into this mindset and achieving this high level of faith that every G-d-fearing Jew covets? How does one achieve financial serenity?

My son said this Dvar Torah last week at the table, and it really hit home. *And the purifying one (the leper) shall wash his clothes and shave all of his hair* (14; 8). The Ben Ish Chai asks, why does the Torah want the leper to shave all of his hair? The Ben Ish Chai answers with the following story from the Midrash Tanchuma (Tazriah 6).

A certain Kohen who would check Tzaraat for community members lost his wealth and had difficulty supporting his wife and children. He heard about a place outside E. Yisrael where business was a breeze, and decided to travel there and test his luck.

The Kohen told his wife about his decision. He taught her how to check Tzaraat for community members while he was gone, for he was the only one in town who knew the laws.

"Remember. Every hair has its root, and the hair reveals information about its root source. If you see that the hair has become dried out and colorless, know that the Tzaraat at the root is very strong. But, if the hair is healthy, the Tzaraat at the root is healed."

His wife then asked him, What if there are two hairs in one root?



Confidently, the Kohen answered his wife. “No such thing! Each hair has its own root, and no two hairs are sustained from the same root. If one hair would take from the root of another hair, a person would lose his eyesight! (see Niddah 52b)”

The woman then said to her husband, “Listen to your own words! If G-d created a source of sustenance for every hair, He has certainly created sustenance for all of *your* hairs, and all your children’s hairs. And if G-d is responsible for sustaining your hair, is He not responsible for sustaining *you, yourself*? Why do you need to leave Eretz Yisrael to find your “financial root”? Why worry about tomorrow’s bread? G-d supports even lice eggs; won’t He support you?

This is what is meant in the words of Ben Azzai : A person does not touch what is prepared for his friend, even a hairsbreadth. (Yoma 38a,b) Why does Ben Azzai use a hairsbreadth as the measure? The Midrash’s story is the answer. Because every hair has its root. And every person has his root, his source. No one can ever take anything from you. Why worry about your competition?

This is a huge lesson and in so many life areas. Parnassah. Shidduchim. Jealousy. Serenity. No one can take anything from you. The reason why a person speaks Lashon Hara is because he views his friend as a threat, invading his territory. When he shaves his head bald, he reveals that although before his haircut, it looked as if the hairs were fighting over the same root, after the haircut, it becomes clear that G-d created a root for each hair.

How does one get this “no competition/ no threat/ no stepping on my toes” mindset engrained in his bones, have it flowing through his veins and encompassing his whole existence? The answer is hidden in the words of Ben Azzai prior to the lesson earlier. ומשלך

יתנו לך *And from what is yours, they gave you.* What do these words mean?

Rashi explains. כלומר: לא משלהם הוא מתנה, אלא מזונות קצובים לך מן השמים. All that you get, your paycheck, your allowance, your food in yeshiva or seminary, etc., is not a present from your boss, your parents, or school office. They were just G-d’s messengers. The food you eat was already set aside for you by Heaven. When you realize this, competition ceases to be reality. It is just a mirage.

In his Bitachon Boot Camp, R Efraim Stauber uses this awesome power tool he coined “Give it back!” The Talmud teaches that one who has pleasure from this world without thanking G-d for it is like a thief. (Berachot 35a) In a meditative way, give back to G-d what you stole from Him, or what you benefited from without praying for it or blessing G-d for it. Now, imagine how it would be without what you thought you were entitled to. Like your ability to breathe. The people you love. The house you live in. The money you have. (Even Bill Gates thought about this! He said what he would do if he would lose all of his money, \$76 billion!) Then pray to G-d, beg for what you thought you were entitled to. When we undo our entitlement thinking, gratitude starts to fill our being, and the Neshama begins to soar.

The Evil Inclination’s way of convincing us of entitlement is through the lie of whatever you had until now, you are entitled to. How does one remain spiritually grounded and focused, continuously grateful and appreciative to G-d without feelings of entitlement?

Recognizing that the present is not bound to the past, and that anything can change at any moment, is the key to tapping into focused prayer. In the second blessing of the Amidah, Mechayeh Metim, resurrection of the dead is mentioned no less than 5 times. Why the

repetition? In his *Olam HaTefillot*, R' E. Munk explains that these five correspond the 5 senses. Every day, three times a day, we give back our eyesight to G-d, our hearing to G-d, our speech to G-d, our taste and touch, and we ask G-d to revive the dead. Why do we believe that we are entitled to these gifts? That is ridiculous! Why do we trust G-d that if we

have had our senses and our life until now, we will always have them? How silly!!!

If we do this exercise enough, we can begin to truly trust G-d, even when the going gets rough. This is why we mention, specifically, in this blessing, our trust in G-d, ונאמן אתה, and מקיים אמונתו.. because giving back what you did not pray for is where all Bitachon begins.

THE MITZVAH OF TACT

Subtle or seemingly minor grammatical changes can give a completely new meaning to words. The laws of dikduk of the Hebrew language are extremely important, and unfortunately, most people who know Hebrew neither learn them nor know them. A common mistake people make about Lashon Hakodesh is believing that it can be translated literally into English. When I teach Hebrew to American yeshiva students in Israel, I offer them a thousand dollars if they can tell me the English meaning of a word in Hebrew they say all the time. The word את.

There is no translation for the word את. The word is not there to mean something, but to link an active verb with a noun. ואהבת את ה' אלוהיך *And you should love Hashem, your G-d.* Why do you need the word את there? The word את means nothing. It is used directly after an active verb to link it to its object. תביא את הכסא *Bring the chair.* שתה את המים *Drink the water.*

This one word, the word את, or the lack of it, can change the whole meaning of a sentence. For example, the passuk ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ה' *And you should love your friend like yourself, I am G-d.* If the meaning was supposed to be that one should love others as much as he loves himself, then the verse should have read ואהבת את רעך כמוך *And you should love your friend like you love yourself.* Instead of the את rule, the passuk inserts a ל, which means, "And you should love to your friend like you love yourself." How do we explain this? (see Maharsha, Shabbat 31a)

The Torah is not telling us to love our friend the same amount that we love ourselves, for it also says, והי אחיך עמך. And Rabbi Akiva learns from

here, חייך קודמים לחיי חבירך (Bava M. 88b). *Your life comes first, before your friend's.* But the Torah is telling us something else. Hillel explains it דעלך סאני אל תעשה לחברך: that which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. (Shabbat 31a) And this complements what is said in the beginning of the passuk, לא תקום ולא תטר *Do not take revenge, do not hate in your heart.* But you do not have to love him like yourself. You just shouldn't do to him what is hateful to you. Put yourself in his place. Try to understand him and make up excuses for him, like you would want others to make up excuses for your own shortcomings, and pardon you. And this is the secret to overcoming the nearly unstoppable drive of revenge and hatred. The only way to understand it is by thinking out of the box, detaching yourself from thoughts of what he has done to you, and reminding yourself that you, also, do wrong. You would not want someone to repay you for your wrongdoing, even if it is deserved. (ר' יוסף בכור שור. A student of Rabbeinu Tam.)

If you look through Talmud, you will notice that the rule of ואהבת לרעך כמוך *Love your friend like yourself,* is mentioned regarding very strange laws. For example. How Bet Din carry out a death sentence on a person who is legally deserving of it. The court makes great effort to find the least painful way of meting out the necessary punishment required by law, because of the passuk ואהבת לרעך כמוך. *What?! But he is not my friend! He is a Rasha!* The point is the same, though. We are not saying, here, that you have to love him like yourself; we are saying that you have to feel with him, empathize with him, out of the box. How would you feel, if you were in his place, if you were the one who stepped out of line? And you

would not want to be meted out the punishments you deserve, to the extent that you deserve them.

The other law that the Talmud learns from this passuk is regarding your wife. Not that you have to love her like yourself - something that is impossible - but that you have to feel with her, understand what she is feeling. Don't do to her what you would not want to be done to you. For example, respect her privacy. Don't put her in a situation where you may discover something that you don't like about her (see Niddah 17a). Don't put her into the position where you are married to her, but do not love her. (Kiddushin 41a) A woman who feels that her husband does not love her would prefer to end her life!

One of the secrets of a happy marriage is that each partner fulfills his duty: the woman has to make sure that her husband is happy to come home to see her, and the man has to make sure that she is sorry to see him leave. For this, you need to think out of the box, out of *your* box. There is actually a word that we use in English that describes these duties, and most of us do not know what it means. The word is tact.

What does tact mean, in English? Tact is behavior that shows you are sensitive to how another person feels in a given situation. Tact is a keen sense of

what to say or do to avoid giving offense; it is a skill in dealing with difficult or delicate situations. It is a kind of mind reading, of what is appropriate, tasteful, or aesthetically pleasing. It's the gift of saying the right thing, because you understand what the situation calls for.

Abraham Lincoln once said that tact is the ability to describe others as they see themselves. Bad taste is simply saying the truth, before it should be said. Tact is the art of making a point, without making an enemy. No tact is doing someone a favor, while reminding him that you are doing him a favor.

Even in honoring parents, if you are not tactful, you do not earn any mitzvah, no matter how hard you try. If you make your parents feel that you are going out of your way for them, that is the worst feeling you can give them. The amount that you went out of your way for them does not come close to how much they went out of their way for you. And the last thing any parent wants is to *feel* they are on the receiving end of their children, the ones that they always gave to. (Kiddushin 31a)

We have a mitzvah to acquire this nature called tact. ואהבת לרעך כמוך. And if tact is a mitzvah, that means that tact is a learnable skill. And it is one of the most central mitzvot in the Torah.

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