



Parashat Kedoshim



English version

# THINKING about ME.org

## THE ART OF BEING KEDOSHIM

There are different opinions of what the hardest mitzvah in the Torah is. What's so ironic is that this week's parasha has almost all of those hardest mitzvot in it.

Why is that? The reason is because Kedoshim is the Parasha of those who are Kadosh, the holy people. Holiness in Judaism does not mean being monk- or nun-like, detaching oneself from everything worldly or physical. Kedoshim means being people of a different league, extraordinary people.

Last week, my friend gave a class on Pirkei Avot, and when he read the words, והוי דן את כל, האדם לכף זכות 'and judge people favorably', he said that this is the hardest Mitzvah in the Torah. I was shocked. I always used to think that the hardest mitzvah of the Torah is to bless G-d for the bad, just like you bless Him for the good. *וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְקֹנֶק אֱלֹהֶיךָ... וּבְכָל-מְאֹדָה* To love G-d and thank Him profusely, no matter what מדה, what measure He metes out for you in life. בכל מאדך - בכל מדה ומדה שהוא מודד לך הוי מודה לו במאד מאד (Berachot 9;5)

Ever notice how when things are good, when we have parnassah, health, family, relationships all as we expect, we don't ask G-d, "Why do I deserve this? What made me worthy of all this blessing?" If so, why do we question G-d, when parnassah, health, family,

or relationships go sour; why do we question G-d, asking Him, why do I deserve this? Acceptance of your lot, no matter what it is, is a Halacha in Shulchan Aruch, not just mussar or exhibiting good character! Just like you are a Jew who keeps Halacha because you wear Tzitzit, Tefillin and keep the Shulchan Aruch, one of those Halachot in there is... *חייב אדם לברך על הרעה בדעת שלמה ובנפש חפצה, כדרך שמברך בשמחה על הטובה, כי הרעה לעובדי השם היא שמחתם וטובתם, כיון שמקבל מאהבה מה שגזר עליו השם נמצא שבקבלת רעה זו הוא עובד את השם, שהיא לו שמחה לו. One is obligated to bless [G-d] for the bad occurrences of life, with a full awareness, and with a willing soul, just like one happily blesses G-d for the good occurrences of life. For that which is "bad" is accepted by the "Knights of G-d" as their joy and their goodness. Accepting life-difficulties that G-d decrees with love, is by definition serving G-d, through being happy. (Sh' A O"h 222;3) So which one is harder? Judging your friend favorably, or accepting G-d and His decrees when your lot goes sour?*

I did not interfere with my friend's class. I kept my thoughts to myself, and, like usual, it's good that I did. Because this week I found that we are both right, and it is not a contradiction! The same source for judging people favorably, which is from this week's parasha, *בְּצִדְקַת תְּשֻׁפֹּט*



עֲמִיתָהּ , can mean both! Although Rashi learns it as referring to judging your friend favorably... Tosafot, in Moshav Zekenim, learns that when G-d brings upon you Midat HaDin, difficult times, the Torah is telling us to judge G-d favorably!! G-d is also, עֲמִיתָהּ, your Friend! If life could be better, it would be better! As Mishna Berurah teaches, כִּי בִאֲמַת כָּל הַיְסוּרִין בֵּין בְּגוֹף וּבֵין בְּמִמּוֹן הוּא הַכֹּל כְּפָרָה עַל הָעוֹנוֹת כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יִצְטָרֵךְ לְהִתְיַסֵּר לְעוֹלָמֵי עוֹלָמִים שֶׁשֵּׁם הָעוֹשֵׁה הַדָּוָל הוּא הַרְבֵּה יוֹתֵר גָּדוֹל *Pain and suffering, physical and financial, are all an atonement for sins, so that a person does not need to suffer Eternally. For in the next world, the punishment is much greater!*

It is actually a Halacha, that a person should always say, no matter what, that everything G-d does is for the best. לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אָדָם רְגִיל לִוְמוֹר: . כָּל מֵה דַעְבִּיד רַחֲמָנָא, לְטַב עֲבִיד (O”H 230;5) What is strange though, is that the way that a person is supposed to say this, according to the Halacha, is in Aramaic! Why not in Hebrew, just say לְטוֹבָה הֵיאָה?!

The answer is that when a Jew praises G-d in a way that the Angels cannot fathom, and they would be jealous, we are to say that praise in Aramaic, a language the angels do not understand. An example of this is saying Kadish. So too, we need to say that “all the bad is good”, in Aramaic, so that the Angels won’t be jealous! Angels do not have “bad” things ever happening to them, so they can never make such an amazing statement!

Ever wonder when King David wrote the following Mizmor? מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְקַוֶּה רָעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר : *A Mizmor to David, YKVK is my Shepherd, I will not lack! ...* גַּם כִּי־אֶלֶף בָּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא־אֶירָא רָע . *Even though I walk in the valley of death, I will not fear evil, for You are with me! Your staff and Your walking-stick, they will console me!*

When did King David write this Psalm??? In Yaar Heret! (Shmuel A 22;5) (Midrash Shochar Tov) What happened right before King David arrived at Yaar Heret??? When King David was fleeing from King Shaul, and his family was in danger, he entrusted his entire family, his father, mother, and all his brothers in the hands of the king of Moab, his relative, hoping they would be protected from King Shaul’s wrath. But instead, the Moabite king killed King David’s entire family, his father and mother and all his brothers, except one! (Rashi from M. Tanhuma) That is when King David composed this psalm!

Shockingly, though, the hardest mitzvah of the Torah, according to R’ Eliezer ben Hurkenus is not this or that. It is respecting your parents. To treat them as great, respectable people. (Chaye Adam) The Halacha is that even if a parent throws one’s purse into the sea or spits in one’s face in front of a large crowd, an individual is still not allowed to act disrespectfully toward him. (Yore Deah 240;8)

This great respect due to your parents is not only when you are dependent on them, for the first 20 years of your life, when you are guests in their home. This Mitzvah of respecting your parents is even when you are not dependent on them, when you are a grown man. As the passuk in this week’s parasha says, אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ . (Ktav Sofer) It could be that you are the one who is supporting them, and they still throw all your money away, or show disrespect for you in public... You still have to respect them!!!

The Ktav Sofer (57) writes that there is a different Mitzvah that is the hardest Mitzvah. The mitzvah of וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא וְעָלִיו הִטָּא *You need to rebuke your friend when he is doing something wrong. [But the Torah warns] do not sin when rebuking.* If one does

not know how to give rebuke softly, not in public, ... if you know that your words will not be accepted, you have a Mitzvah not to speak, not say a word! Most people don't know how to rebuke! ואמר רבי אילעא משום ר' אלעזר בר' שמעון: כשם שמצוה על אדם לומר דבר הנשמע, כך מצוה על אדם שלא לומר דבר שאינו נשמע (Yevamot 65b) As hard as the mitzvah of Kibud Av Vaem is to respect your parents, it is an equally hard mitzvah for parents to keep their mouths closed when they see their children misbehaving, and they know that their children won't listen to their rebuke anyway! In those scenarios, מִנַּת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד־לִשְׁוֹן One word to the child, can destroy the kid, or build the kid, forever.

Other opinions are that the hardest mitzvah is forbidden relationships, עריות. Still other opinions are that it is to not hold a grudge. לֹא־תִקֶּם וְלֹא־תִטֹּר. You have to let go of the anger in your heart. Either take the person to Beit Din, or don't; just don't hate him! Instead, approach him and tell him your feelings!! It can be so hard! All these difficult Mitzvoth are listed in our Parasha, Parashat Kedoshim, and all of these are superhuman mitzvoth, mitzvoth that make us extraordinary!

Most people think that being extraordinary is not for them... Most people feel that they are so far from spirituality... What is interesting, though, is that the passuk that commands us not to serve idols is adjacent to the mitzvah of being holy. קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְקֹנֵךְ אֱלֹהֶיכֶם: *You should be holy, because I am holy...* And then the passuk says אַל־תִּפְנוּ אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים *Don't turn to the gods!* How can G-d command the one who is struggling with idol worship to become someone who is holy or spiritually extraordinary?? To teach you that even if someone is fighting just for basic faith, he can find inside the extraordinary power to realize, that אין עוד מבלדו! There is nothing in the world

other than the Will of G-d! Whatever level of spirituality you're on, even from the lowest of the low, ... G-d expects you to rise above ordinariness and be extraordinary.

So here is this week's story from R' Goel Elkarif. A Jew who visited Italy told him this story. That Jew heard the story from a tour guide there, about a group of Hassidic Jews who had been in Italy a week previously.

This Hassidic group was travelling on a private bus on the highway with many lanes, a highway that rarely has traffic. They intended to pray Minha upon their return to the hotel. For whatever reason, there was suddenly a big traffic jam on their highway. The Hassidim knew that they would not be able to arrive at the hotel before sunset. The told their guide that they wanted to stop at the nearby gas station to wash their hands and pray Minha properly.

The tour guide told them, "Just pray on the bus."

The said, "What? On the bus? There is no chance! We want to pray standing up, we want to wash our hands first..."

The tour guide responded, "Are you insane? This is Italy! There is antisemitism around here! If people see you praying at the gas station, who knows what they will do to you!" But the Hassidim insisted. "Someone who beautifies a Mitzvah, nothing bad will happen to them!"

The guide stopped the bus. The Hassidim got off the bus, washed their hands, and got ready to pray, deciding who among them should be the Hazzan. Suddenly, they see a huge motorcycle pull up right next to them, with a very loud and obnoxious engine-sound. The motor-biker had a ponytail and looked scary.



He pulled off his helmet, and looked at the Hassidic group. “Minha?” he asked.

They said, Yes. He said, Great. He prayed Minha with them, and then said Kaddish. One of the guys approached him, and asked, “Excuse me. But the way you look, I would have never thought that you knew what Minha or Kaddish is, or what it even means to be a Jew...”

The biker said, “I grew up in Jerusalem, in Beit Yisrael neighborhood, in a Hareidi home. I went to Chutz La-aretz, and I went down in my spirituality, and in my religious observance. My father died a few years ago. Shortly before he passed, when we knew that his days were limited, he asked to speak with me. He said, “I begged you, that you put on Tefillin and keep Shabbat; but it seems that I have no one to talk to. One thing I am asking from you, please say Kaddish for me!”

I said to my father, You want *me* to say Kaddish!?! Better that I should not say Kaddish! I eat pork with my mouth, and I use my mouth to speak inappropriate talk. My mouth won't be able to help your soul with its Kaddish!!!

My father responded, “It seems that this is the Kaddish that I deserve... But all I am asking of you is to say Kaddish, once a year, on my Yahrzeit. That is it. Once a year!

O.k. No problem.

I said Kaddish each year on his yahrzeit. But today, I planned on travelling from my city in Italy, where I live, to Merce. 700 kilometers. As I was in middle of my trip, I remembered that today is my father's Yahrzeit. But as I was on the road, I realized that in all these small cities on the road, there are no minyanim, no Kaddish. As I road my bike, I turned to G-d and said, Master of the World! If you want me to say Kaddish for my father, please make it that I will have a minyan! This will be the sign. If my Kaddish is worth anything, I will find a minyan! But if my kaddish is not worth anything, I will not find a minyan!

I kept riding my bike, and the sun was setting. I understood that my Kaddish was not worth anything. Suddenly, I see a group of Hassidim at a gas station, out of nowhere, getting ready to pray. My heart jumped! G-d made it possible for me to say Kaddish on my father! G-d showed me that my Kaddish is worth something!

The Hassid told the man: G-d made this whole traffic jam, out of nowhere, in Italy, and a bunch of Hassidim who are not afraid of antisemitism, and who will do anything to pray the best Minha they can, because there is nothing in the world that is precious to G-d, like your Kaddish!!! So why do you say Kaddish once a year?! Say it as often as you can!

## THE CHOICE OF EXTRAORDINARINESS

There are five choices that we can make that will decide if and how much we are productive, especially when bouncing back during times of crisis and challenge. Choice no. 1: Act on the Important; Don't react to the urgent. Choice no. 2: Go for extraordinary;

Don't settle for the ordinary. Choice 3: Schedule the most important first; Leave the less important for later. Choice 4: Rule your technology; Don't let it rule you. Choice 5: Fuel your heart and soul; Don't burn out.





Choice 2 is the lesson of this week's Parasha: Go for extraordinary; Don't settle for the ordinary. There is nothing wrong about being ordinary, living a normal and peaceful life. But living extraordinary lives means living a life in which you feel deeply satisfied, accomplishing those things that you feel are of genuine value and have the most importance. What are the extraordinary accomplishments/achievements that will make you feel satisfied when you go to bed at the end of each day?

*Parashat Kedoshim, with all its Mitzvoth, was said by Moshe in Hakhel, the gathering of the entire nation. The reason is that it is the most pivotal Parasha. (Sifra; Rashi) In what way is Parashat Kedoshim a pivotal Parasha?*

In the introduction of Kedoshim, G-d commands each one of us, even the simplest Jew who attends Hakhel, to be Kadosh. There is no proper English translation to the word Kadosh. Kadosh is loosely translated as holy. But, holy, in the English dictionary, means exalted, perfect, sacred. Most Jews cannot relate to becoming exalted, perfect, or sacred. And that is fine, because "Holy" is not an accurate translation of the word Kadosh. When we redefine our terms and the words we use, we redefine our thinking, we redefine ourselves and become extraordinary. So, what is Kadosh?

The word Kadosh means separate, set aside. The Beit Hamikdash was divided into three separate areas: the courtyard, the Kodesh, and the Kodesh Hakodoshim; each one was *separate* from the one before it. Kiddushin is the process of setting a woman aside for no man other than her husband. Ironically, a harlot is referred to as a Kedesha, a word that shares the root "kadosh" – for she is separated from civilization, set aside because of her immoral behavior. (see Rashi Breshit 38;21) When the

angels join with the Jewish nation each day and refer to G-d as Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh, the meaning is that G-d is separated, in every conceivable way, from the grasp of the highest angels and humanity. He is above nature and any other confining measurement. When we make Kiddush, we are testifying how the day of Shabbat is different and separate from Chol, which is ordinary. When we circumcise our children, we are letting them know, for the rest of their lives, that they are different than the gentile.

Rashi comments that the way to become Kadosh and separate is specifically through refraining from immoral relations and behavior. Separation from immorality makes us an Am Kadosh, a Separate Nation, an extraordinary nation, more than anything else. More than refraining from stealing or murder. Why?

It is part of human nature for there to be an attraction between opposite genders. Jews are commanded to rise above their nature. That is what Kedusha means: to separate ourselves from the ordinary and transcend to the extraordinary. Refraining from stealing or committing murder is not something that will make you Kadosh, because it is not extraordinary, nor is it raising above your nature.

You cannot be a complete Jew, who aspires to observe all 613, if you are an ordinary person. The pivot of our Parasha, the uniqueness of it, is the many mitzvoth that demand you to be extraordinary! Not only in our relationship between Man and G-d, but between Man and his friend, and Man and himself. Allow me to give you just a few examples.

We are commanded in the Parasha to judge others favorably. If the person in question is



one who is considered righteous, if there exists only a slim chance to justify what he has done, the Torah commands us to judge him favorably. (See Chafetz Chaim LH Asin, 3) But how can the Torah command me how to think? Chances are, ninety-nine out of a hundred, that he sinned and acted immorally!!! If you heard Lashona Hara – even from a reliable source – you are not allowed to believe it! You are only allowed to take caution and suspect, but not to believe! *You are not allowed to think the way you naturally think!* You are expected to rise above the way you think!

Not only is revenge forbidden, but even your feelings toward the person who wronged you are dictated by the Torah. When a person asks you to do him a favor, and you do it, even though he once denied your request, you are forbidden to feel, in your heart, that you are better than he is! G-d commands you to love your friend, as you love yourself – that same “friend” that it would be only natural for you to hate. *You are commanded to rise above the way you naturally feel.* How can the Torah command me to think differently from how I think or feel differently from how I feel? How is it even in my control? The only way is to transcend, to leave ordinariness behind me, and become extraordinary!

Judaism even expects you to rise above your nature, your personality, your values, and your perspectives. Run away from honor, but honor everyone else. Live within your means and practice frugality, but support your wife and kids above your standards. Forget the good things you did for others, but remember the good they did for you. When a person abuses me verbally or physically, Judaism expects me

Selfie Steps to rise above your nature.

to believe that it was G-d who sent this person as a messenger, and it was not his choice. But when I hurt someone else, Judaism expects me to take responsibility, to recognize that it was *my* bad choice, and I need to repent!

Life is like a wheel. Not any wheel, but like the annoying wheel of a shopping cart that is not going in the direction you want it to go. When life changes on you, you need to rise above your nature. Above all your limitations, above the way you think, feel, believe, behave, above your version of your life story, above the rat race, and even above your education. Today, to survive, we need to be supersonic learners and adapters, and not rely on the outdated information we learned at school or the outset of our careers. Extroverts are challenged to become introverted, and vice versa. Rabbis and Morahs are challenged to become tech-savvy in a kosher way and learn and control technology to redefine Torah education. Merchants are challenged to build brands, sell on Amazon/eBay, and become online marketing gurus. You can't afford to succumb to your natural thoughts, feeling, or even nature.

Adapters to change recommend those who wish to rise above their limiting beliefs, to alter their inner lexicon. Say “I won't” instead of “I can't.” Thoughts like “I can't learn a new job,” “I can't downsize my business,” “I can't lower my budget,” are not your friends. Learn how you can make better choices. Even if it is just your inner lexicon, your choice of words. We have so many choices to make, even when it seems as if there are almost none. Victor Frankl taught about dealing with challenge and change: You always have control over one thing: the meaning you give to an event and your response to it.



1. Shift perspective. See the events of today through the lens of tomorrow, of what really matters. Learn to see things from someone else's shoes.
2. Widen your options of how you can respond to an event and what meaning you can give it. If you are angry or hurt or jealous, it is because you chose to be.
3. Understand that your emotions work within a closed cycle. Self-control helps us make better choices. Better choices increase one's self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem automatically deflates the ego. A smaller ego means a greater perspective. A greater perspective makes it easier to gain self-control. Self-control helps us make better changes. Etc. Etc.
4. Adapt the belief, "Nothing in my life will change for the better unless I change."
5. Plan ahead, live with a schedule and long-term perspective. When you live with meaningful goals and move toward your goals with integrity, it is much easier to have self-discipline.
6. Learn Torah; open your mind to wisdom. Lust for immorality only resides in a heart that is devoid of wisdom. (Rambam Issurei Bi'ah 22;21)
7. Believe in G-d and that He created you in His Image. Your biggest enemy is helplessness. You can overcome anything if you just believe in G-d and yourself long enough.
8. Realize that the difficulties you face, the difficult people you encounter, are all part of your unique and custom-tailored spiritual journey of rectification and soul perfection. The same challenges will keep coming back in different forms until you learn how to rise above.

### WHAT THE PRIEST TAUGHT ME

I got off the phone with the priest. He gave me chizuk. He was not your regular priest. He was a priest who converted to Judaism, and is now Ultra Orthodox. "I have no problem with Torah scholars learning self-help techniques from the gentiles, whether it is in coaching or any other therapy that works. But there is so much in our sifrei Mussar, early mussar, late mussar, chassidische or Litvishe. Why do we need to look into their books before we know *our* books and work on the "techniques" offered in our own literature? The gentiles think differently, live differently, and believe differently. Their beliefs and thoughts are between the lines in their books, even if there

is no intention to change us and make us think as they do. How can one be sure that the good techniques that he gets from the "good gentile" do not have some life example that is not suitable for our circles of the Kodesh Hakedoshim, the inside circles of the ultra religious Orthodox?" He was on speaker. I heard it. My wife heard it. I hung up, and that was it. Enough mussar from the ex-priest. I went straight into the beit midrash and pulled out the Alei Shur from R. Wolbe. To page 256. BAM! What I saw was exactly the latest self-help discoveries that the self-help world has discovered. First, a little background:



People want to know why coaching is becoming well liked and well received. People want to know **why** it works and **how** it can be that something so enjoyable and fun can be so effective. And, how can it be that it is helping people in ways that other therapies did not? Four questions, one answer: Will.

There is a tremendous power in the universe. It is called the power of focused thought. Over the last forty years, people in the world of psychology and self- help realized *that it is not only our subconscious* that is governing our thought, feelings and behavior. Researchers realized that you can govern and control these through conscious thought, as well. If someone is feeling happy – he must have had a happy thought. If someone is feeling sad – something negative must have been going through his head. Almost all feelings can be traced to the thought that came before, after, or during the feeling. Although the client may not be aware of this thought, a good therapist can help him find it . After the thought has been identified , the therapist can help the person whose emotions are affecting his life productivity by replacing the thoughts with more effective ones. The way someone feels is very important, for that will define how productive that person will be. So, it goes like this: Thoughts and beliefs, followed by feelings and behavior . They are all connected. All of this shows you how great the power of thought, conscious thought, actually is, for it is the root of feelings and behavior. Whereas the past and the subconscious have been the center of attention until now, the aspect of present feeling and opinion has been neglected. We do not have to analyze the “why” of the past, as well as all the subconscious input, but rather to realize that the feelings a person has have much to do with the way he is thinking in close connection to what he is feeling. This is the idea behind CBT- cognitive behavioral therapy.

The therapist does not have to go to the past of the client, everything is “here and now”. And then, over the last twenty years, life coaching has also become very popular. Coaching works with the will of the client. The power of will is a stronger power in getting a person moving in the direction of his wants than the power of organizing thoughts.

The question of the coach to his client is always directed to the “wants” of the client. “What, how, when, where, or who do you **want** to be...” The coach is working the whole time with the wants of the client. Not with the thoughts. It even catches the client off guard, because many times he is not even thinking about what he wants, but what is in his head. The coach works to help the person to get where he wants to be. That’s it. Of course, there may be some thoughts that must be dealt with through CBT. There may be a need to find out some “why”s on the way, or get over the past with a psychologist. But coaching is about moving forward to what the person wants. Not only that: many times, a person’s thoughts are in his head because that is where his wants are. Help him figure out his wants, help him figure out his value system and where his wants stand on the ladder of importance, and his thoughts are taken care of as well.

This is exactly what R. Wolbe writes. The word רצון , *will* , is connected to the word רוץ , to run. A person’s **will** will cause him to run to do those things that he wants. A person’s wants are a stronger drive than his thoughts; he will run after things that he wants without first thinking through all the variables. We see a few times in the Torah אהבה מקלקלת את השורה *desire overrides the train of thought*. Bilaam saddled his own donkey early in the morning without the help of his servants out of his excitement to curse the Jews. At the other





end of the spectrum, Abraham saddled his own donkey early in the morning out of his excitement to fulfill the will of G-d and offer Yitschak on the Altar. Didn't Bilaam know that he could not curse the Jews against G-d's will? Wouldn't it have been logical for Abraham to take a little time that day to make sense out of the contradictory prophecies? (כִּי בִיצְחָק יִקְרָא לְךָ) (זרע) The answer lies in the will – what is your deepest will? If it is clear to you, your feet will take you there. King David would prepare the itinerary befitting a busy king, but found that his feet would bring him, instead, to the Beit Midrash. This is because a person's will is so strong that it controls his behavior more than his thoughts do. This is not because he acts without thinking. It is because a powerful want, a clear focused want, ignites creativity and new ideas. I see this with my children. A child who does not usually exhibit creativity will suddenly find a really creative way to climb the cabinets for a piece of chocolate. The wants get the thoughts running: creativity juices overflow when he is in touch with his wants, and the candy. And the father of all innovations, father of all breakthrough, is creativity. So when the coach gets down to the will, creativity begins. By uncovering the inner will, a new thinking pattern uncovers as well.

I actually had a writer's block this week. I went to shul and I told this concept to my Israeli study partner in Hebrew, and I said that aside from this thought, I did not have

anything to write that is a coaching concept connected to our Parasha. He told me that as a matter of fact, this concept answers a question from the Gemara in Tractate Zevachim (47a) – one that he could not get out of his head. The question comes from a passuk in our parasha. How do you know that if someone is מתעסק in קדשים – *a kohen who brings a sacrifice, but is just going through the correct motions, but without the proper intent* – such a korban is disqualified? The answer is because in this week's parasha it says לרצונכם תזבחו you should bring your korban in conjunction with your will to bring it. The Talmud learns from these words לדעתכם תזבחו that you must sacrifice in conjunction with your knowledge. My friend said, "But it does not say in the Torah לדעתכם , your knowledge. It says לרצונכם , with your will...? It must be, then, that we learn from this piece of Talmud, that the root of all knowledge is will. Our thoughts go along with, and stay in the frame of our wants. When we get clear what we want, our thinking improves as well.

Coaching can be just as powerful, if not more, than other therapies, because it goes behind the scenes of the thoughts. Another ancient (and perennially relevant) insight from sifrei mussar, something that the gentiles figured out only in the last couple of years. And, again, the Beit Hamidrash is the place to find out anything you want to know.

## A GOOD HEART

The most important word I learnt since I started coaching is the word resourcefulness. Tony Robbins, the world's leading coach

says, *When people fail to achieve, they often say they are missing resources like time, money, people and so on. Yet, the top achievers*



*in the world know that resources are never the problem; the real problem is a lack of resourcefulness.* What is resourcefulness? Resourcefulness is the ability to find quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties. It is a skill or talent for making the most out of what you have, so that you reach your greatest accomplishments.

As a coach, I never gave bad advice. Because a good coach *never* gives advice. The Hebrew word for advice is עצה. Yet the Hebrew word for resourcefulness is תושיה. The job of the coach is to challenge the client with a good, open ended, question so that the client comes up with an answer to a question by being resourceful, tapping into “resourcefulness”. The coach is not supposed to be wiser than the client, telling the client what or what not to do. Rather, a coach who is doing his job is a coach who unveils the resourcefulness of his client.

What is this word Tushiah? לִי-עֵצָה וְתוֹשִׁיָּה: (Mishlei 8) *To me is advice and resourcefulness.* The Torah is called Tushiah. *When G-d created the world, He consulted with the Torah, whose name is Tushiah. And the Torah said, Master of the World, if there is no army, if there is no camp to the King, over what is He King? And if there is no Nation praising the King, where is His honor? The Master of the world heard, and it was sweet to Him. The Torah said, HKBH consulted with me to create the world as it says, לִי-עֵצָה וְתוֹשִׁיָּה. To me is advice and resourcefulness.* (Pirkei D R Eliezer 3) The Torah did not give advice. It asked G-d a power question.

In Mishlei, we find again that Torah is Tushiah. (2;7) יִצְפֹּן לְיִשְׂרָאֵל תוֹשִׁיָּה R Eliezer asked R Yehoshua to explain this passuk to him. He said to him, “My son, from the time a person is created in his mother’s womb, the Torah that

he is going to learn is hidden for him”. A person has hidden inside him his portion of Torah, his way of understanding its truth. It just needs to be tapped into. Resourcefulness.

What is the tool that makes it possible to tap into this resourcefulness?

R Yochanan Ben Zakai told five of his students to go out and find the right path a person should choose for himself. R Elazar Ben Arach’s answer was, a good heart. And R Elazar unique strength was that he was מעיין המתגבר a bubbling spring. An endless source of Torah knowledge.

What is a good heart? What is a bad heart? We are obviously not referring to the blood pump in the torso. Rather, a good heart is referring to the spiritual component in the body that is responsible for love, friendship, hate, and cruelty. This spiritual entity is connected to and ‘pumps energy’ to the whole body, just like the heart pumps blood to the whole body. A good heart is a heart with no negativity, no hatred or harbored resentment or anger, no haughtiness or jealousy. Such a heart is capable of all the resourcefulness in the universe, and is a potential source of endless Torah knowledge.

It is interesting. From the day of Lag BaOmer onward, we cease to mourn R Akiva’s 24,000 students. Why? Because day 33 is the day between the words לב and טוב. 32 is the numerical value of Lev – heart. Tov’s numerical value is 17, and there are 17 days left to the Omer from day 32 on. 33 is the beginning of a good heart. From this point of the Sefirah onward, the character refinement focuses on improving one’s heart. The Or Hachaim splits the 48 ways to acquire Torah into three groups. The last group, the last 16 are days that are related to the last sixteen of



the 48 ways to acquire Torah, and these ways are character refinement. We can notice how when R' Shimon Bar Yochai refers to his students, he calls them Chevraya, friends. This good heart was what empowered R' Shimon to tap into his part of Torah, which ended up becoming the Zohar.

And this was the answer of R Elazar Ben Arach. The way that a person should choose, the path leading to becoming a Torah scholar, is not acquiring more tools. It is to improve one's character. Because when you have a good heart, you have infinite internal capacity for Torah knowledge. Ever wonder how R Akiva, who shared the Alef Bais book with his son in school at the age of 40, was able to outdo all the Rabbis of his generation? How did Rachel, his wife, recognize his potential and know that she believed in him, when he was still a shepherd??

Rachel saw in him the good heart. And once someone's heart is perfect, polished, and pure,

the Torah fits right in! It fits like a glove. Of course, with Rabbi Akiva it needed to drip-drop; it needed an uninterrupted 24-year learning streak. But Rabbi Akiva's heart was so good that he was able to tap into his resources and bring out endless Torah knowledge.

There are so many aspects of a good heart. Appreciation. Happiness. Contentment. Humility. Patience. To name just a few. The Talmud teaches why the Torah is called Tushiah. For it weakens (from the word Mateshet) a person's negative desires and perspectives. (Sanhedrin 26b) King Solomon tells us, לְתַאֲוָה יִבְקֹשׁ נַפְרָד בְּכָל־תּוֹשִׁיָהּ יִתְגַּלֵּעַ One who seeks desires will become a loner, and in all of his Torah, he will become wrong. When you are not content, when you believe you deserve more, when you are not happy, when you want something and you can't wait for it, your heart is not a good heart. And not only do you lose your friends, but you lose your resourcefulness and learning capacity as well.

## 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 אה.

There is no translation for the word אה. The word is not there to mean something, but to

link an active verb with a noun. ואהבת את ה' 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 אה, 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 אה 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, וחי 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, even if it is deserved, for your wrongdoing. (ר' יוסף בכור שור. A student of Rabbeinu Tam.)

If you look through Talmud, you will notice that the rule of *Love your friend like yourself*, ואהבת לרעך כמוך, 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.

## REPROACHING THE SINFUL RIGHTEOUS

A certain psychologist was concerned as to exactly how to respond to a patient who confesses his sin, looking for acceptance and understanding. *“On the one hand, if I do a “blame shift” or lighten the severity of the sin, allowing the patient to feel that he **could** face himself in the mirror, then I may be transgressing the mitzvah of giving rebuke. And if I tell him that he was wrong, then things could get much worse. The solution I found so as not to be sitting by passively while the person is pouring out a litany of his transgressions is to ask him if he thinks that what he did was the right thing to do. Then, I show him genuine respect for coming and telling – admitting – his failures and mistakes. This somehow helps the person feel comfortable and not embarrassed to see me even after therapy.”*

Many times we hear about the mitzvah of giving rebuke and wonder: should I be saying something to the child? Should I tell the person just how bad his/her actions are?

The Talmud (Bava Metzia 31a) tells us that the repetition of the words הוכח תוכיח, *rebuke and rebuke*, comes to teach that one must rebuke even one hundred times! There are different ways to understand this. One approach is that sometimes the person giving

the rebuke is not worthy of saying what needs to be said. And at other times, the person who sinned is not ready to hear what he is supposed to hear. It may be that only after one hundred times both prerequisites can be met: that a person can actually say what needs to be said to the person who really needs to and can hear it.

This is an interesting twist on that piece of Talmud. However, I have found the following to be very valuable. The passuk says הוכח תוכיח : אה עמיתך ולא תשא עליו חטא : Rebuke your friend, and do not bring sin upon yourself because of it. This can be interpreted to mean that if you do **not** give rebuke, **you** are guilty of sin. When understood on a basic level, this can seem stressful. However, there is a deeper meaning here. The words ולא תשא עליו חטא also mean “do not put a sin **on him**”. The Chavot Yair (also see Zohar) explains this to mean that when one gives rebuke, he should not let the person feel that he is a רשע, a wicked person. Rather, he should say things that can uplift him – “such acts are not befitting either for you or for your level of character”. Do not make him feel as if he is a sinner; rather, that he is a righteous person who has sinned. An external act – ולא תשא עליו חטא – that is not to be identified with the one who performed it. Labeling a person with a title of “sinner” or



רשע causes the person to feel disabled, disarmed and depressed.

## HOW HOLY ARE YOU?

Take out a minute to answer the following questions: How holy are you? What was the holiest moment you felt in your life? Who was the holiest man you ever met and got to know?

This is the type of question that many of us have never thought about. While I was writing this article, I posed these questions to someone, and this was his reply. *“The holiest moment of my life was when I came to ninth grade dormitory yeshiva and experienced great difficulty in the new surroundings. I prayed to G-d with all my heart, and I felt that a certain prayer that I made, with fervor and tears, had pierced the heavens and was answered. When a person reaches a holy point, he comes back to himself, he connects with himself. He reaches out to the person he should be.*

*“The holiest man I ever met was my ninth grade rabbi. He was not necessarily the smartest or most knowledgeable in Torah, but he was holy. He was holy because he was separated from this world, and had more self control (than other people). He was not only realizing the truth – he was the truth. His התבטלות , self-deprecation, to Hashem in his actions, thoughts and emotions all gave me this holy feeling about him.”*

These words struck me. I did not think that common people thought about this question or connected holiness to their life story. Parashat Kedoshim starts off with exactly this topic: the commandment to become holy. However, there is a difference of opinion as to exactly how we understand this and to what it is referring. The Ramban learns that holiness is the act of separating oneself from overindulgence in permissible pleasures. Rashi learns here

differently. Rashi understands that when the Torah tells us that one should be holy, it says so right after discussing forbidden marital relations. The way for one to become holy, according to Rashi, is through refraining from such relations and from anything that may bring one to such a position. This includes keeping one's eyes from seeing things that can lead us astray – refraining from thoughts that may bring one to temptation. According to Rashi, this is what holiness is about- a clear mind from such thoughts and a lifestyle where we do our utmost to avoid being associated in any way with unhealthy, forbidden desires.

The question, though, is obvious. Why is it that only those refraining from this specific transgression merit holiness? When someone does not steal or does not kill and refrains from anything even remotely associated with such behavior – why does that not make him holy? And why, just by **refraining** from doing what the Torah considers abomination and unholy, does one become holy?

R' Yerucham Levovitz, zt"l, explains that there is a great difference between refraining from stealing and refraining from forbidden marital pleasures. The desire for marital pleasure is one that every healthy human being has inside him from the minute when he is born; it grows and develops throughout all the stages of life. It is a great thing for a person to overcome this powerful, almost irresistible drive, and therefore, one can merit a level called holiness by the Torah through doing so. Refraining from a desire to steal or kill will not render one holy, for it is something that is not an inborn, human desire. The antonym of lust is holiness!

From here, it is apparent that if a person does not actively, consciously work on restraining himself from these specific things, his natural penchant – that of man – is to be corrupt in these matters.

***IF YOU ARE ENJOYING THESE ARTICLES FREE EACH WEEK, PLEASE HELP SUPPORT THIS PUBLICATION!***

**SPECIAL OFFER! Take upon yourself to spread the papers/emails and receive free coaching sessions with Rabbi Y. Farhi! Send an email to [rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com](mailto:rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com) for details.**

**One week's sponsor to cover all costs is \$100.**

**These articles are being distributed to over 20 thousand readers each week!**

**To support this publication, or receive it by e-mail, please email me at [rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com](mailto:rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com).**

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H**