TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Kedoshim
May 11, 2024 | 3 Iyar 5784
Haftorah: Ezekiel 22:1–19

We believe that in times of great strife, words of Torah can provide stability and comfort in our lives. We know that you join us in praying for the safety of our soldiers and citizens, and that together we mourn the terrible losses already suffered.

We stand together for a strong and secure Israel.

From Hate to Love

Bex Stern-Rosenblatt
Parashah

This week, we are holy. This week, you do not “hate your brother in your heart,” but rather, you “love your fellow man as yourself,” because “I am the Lord.” How do we get from hate to love? How do we be holy because God is holy? The path seems to involve embracing rebuke and rejecting revenge.

In these two critical verses, Leviticus 19:17-18, we read: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely reprove your fellow and not bear guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance, and you shall not harbor a grudge against the members of your people. And you shall love your fellow man as yourself. I am the Lord.”

In order to love our brother as ourselves, we treat him as we treat ourselves. We break down the boundary which prevents us from telling others when they err. In doing so, we take responsibility for them. Just as we reprove ourselves, we reprove others. If this system works, we need not take vengeance. We need not harbor grudges. After all, surely our brothers have listened to what we have said, changed their ways, and we can all live happily ever after in a valley of love and peace.

Or not. The final words of this verse are “I am the Lord.” This phrase shows up occasionally in Leviticus, often for emphasis. We find it tacked on to the most important of commandments. It shows up at the end of our chapter, lest we forget: “You shall faithfully observe all my laws and all my rules: I am the Lord.” Clearly, the commandment to love our fellow is important. It makes sense that this formula would appear here. But perhaps it is doing more than just signaling importance. Perhaps it provides a clue to what happens when our brothers do not listen to our rebuke.

We are told not to take vengeance, nekamah, and not to bear a grudge, netirah. This is a huge ask, particularly assuming that our brothers, whom we have already rebuked, continue to do what is bad in our eyes. The word for vengeance first appears in the context of just

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such a wayward brother. That brother, Cain, was rebuked by God himself when he became angry at the injustice in the acceptance of his brother’s sacrifice and the rejection of his own. Cain then murdered Abel. And so God introduces vengeance into the world, but not against Cain. Instead, God declares that against anyone who kills Cain sevenfold vengeance shall be exacted.

Vengeance is not something to be taken lightly. At the end of the Torah, in Parashat Haazinu, we read God’s statement that vengeance belongs to him. We praise God because “He’ll avenge the blood of his servants, wreak vengeance on his foes.” God will wreak vengeance even on us, if we break his covenant.

When our brothers do not listen to our rebuke, we remember that vengeance is God’s. We continue to rebuke them. We continue to love them. And we cry out, as in Psalm 94, “God of retribution, Lord, God of retribution, appear! Rise up, judge of the earth, give the arrogant their deserts!”
Judging Others, Judging Ourselves

Rabbi Daniel Raphael Silverstein

Insights from Hassidut

Rabbi Daniel Silverstein teaches Hassidut at the CY and directs Applied Jewish Spirituality (www.appliedjewishspirituality.org). In these weekly videos, he shares Hassidic insights on the parashah or calendar.

Click below to watch the video:
How old is old, you ask. How would I know? I’m not sure how time passes or unfolds. How can it be that I, still surely young, Am suddenly the age of those called old?

What is it to be old? To turn one’s gaze Not towards what’s yet to come, but to the past. To dream of yesterday and not what’s next To take stock not of “firsts” – but rather “lasts.”

I have a friend who’s old (perhaps just older?) – I ask her, “What is new? How is your week?” She struggles to respond. But when I probe Her memories, she cannot stop to speak.

Her face is lined with wrinkles, and each crease Contains within it stories, truths hard-earned She knows where I stand now; she’s been there too, Each word she shares attests to all she’s learned.

“Show deference for the aged,” the Torah reads. “And stand before the white-haired.” Don’t forget Our time here on this earth is but the chance To learn and grow from every day we get.

Life teaches us new lessons at each stage We pray to grow in wisdom as we age.

* The Talmud teaches that the Torah was given in black fire on white fire (Y. Shekalim 6:1). The black fire is the letters of the Torah scroll, and the white fire is the parchment background. In this column, consisting of a poem on each parashah, I will try to illuminate the white fire of Torah – the midrashim, stories, and interpretations that carve out the negative space of the letters and give them shape.