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Kedoshim: Unpacking the Process

The great tzadik of Yerushalayim, Rav Aryeh Levin, zt'l was the paradigm of kindness, holiness and righteousness. A beloved sage who radiated *ahavas ha-brios*, 'love of all beings', exemplified a life of *Toras Chesed*, earning the trust and respect of Jews from all walks of life.

In the early days of the fledgling State, due to difficult economic conditions, there were a number of stores in the center of town that remained open on Shabbos. Community activists and rabbanim worked to educate and inspire, convince and cajole the shop-keepers to respect the sanctity of Shabbos as well as the *kedusha* of Yerushalayim — and to close their stores by sundown. One store owner was particularly obstinate in his refusal to close his shop.

When Reb Aryeh heard of the situation, he volunteered to intervene. That Friday afternoon, dressed in his Shabbos finery, Reb Aryeh visited the store. He walked up and down the aisles, surveying the goods, observing the hustle and bustle of customers coming in, making their purchases. As the sun began to slide behind the stone buildings, and the inner glow of Shabbos

spread through the Holy City, Reb Aryeh made himself comfortable on a chair next to the entrance of the store.

The owner was unsure what Reb Aryeh was doing and began to feel uncomfortable with the *tzadik's* presence. The time for *Mincha* had already arrived, and Reb Aryeh showed no sign of moving. He just sat there watching the steady flow of customers entering and exiting the shop....

"*K'vod HaRav*, dear Rabbi" the owner finally whispered, blushing, "...is there anything I can do for you?" Reb Aryeh's voice was gentle and full of empathy: "My dear brother! When I heard that an *ehrliche yid* like yourself keeps his store open on Shabbos, I'll be honest, I couldn't understand how it was possible. I needed to come and see for myself how difficult it must be for you to close your business. And...seeing how many customers are here and how much business you are doing, I must say, I feel for you, this must be such a challenge for you."

The yid was visibly moved "*K'vod HaRav*, I don't know what to say; I've taken so many threats, so much pressure, and the harshest criticism from people who have never even met me. It means so much to me that you came here today, and that you really do understand how hard this is for me..."

Reb Aryeh rose to leave, looked the shopkeeper in the eyes, and wished him a heartfelt "Shabbat Shalom." Soon thereafter, the store was closed for Shabbos — in

honor of the holy Shabbos...and ostensibly, in honor of Reb Aryeh.

In this week's sedra, Parshas Kedoshim, we are called upon to lovingly and respectfully admonish our brother who has erred:

לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ
הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חָטָא:
לֹא־תִקֵּם וְלֹא־תִטּוֹר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ
וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה'.

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart.

You shall surely rebuke your fellow, but you shall not bear a sin on his account.

You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people;

you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I am Hashem. (19:17-18)

Unpacking the structure and sequence of these instructions reveals an insightful inner road map, process and a *derech* toward achieving what our sages consider *klal gadol baTorah*, “the most essential principle of Torah”: וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ.

Healthy relationships are founded on open, honest communication. לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־ אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ, “Do not to hate your brother in your heart,” is therefore the first and foundational step on this path. We may at times

feel slighted, jealous, angry, resentful, sad or bitter. All such feelings are normal. The Torah only warns us not to harbor such negative feelings, to be careful to not let them fester, for if they fester, they may eventually erupt upon another person.

With the directive of הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ, “admonish your neighbor who has erred,” the Torah encourages us to acknowledge and honestly address our feelings so that we can respond to distressing situations consciously and constructively.

Tochacha, admonishment or ‘rebuke’ is not easy. Yet, while it may be hard to express painful emotions or tell someone of your disappointment or disapproval, when *tochacha* is shared within a context of love and respect, it can create deeper connection with the other and better spiritual health for both of us. The essence of *tochacha* is reflected in the Arizal’s teaching that all souls constitute one body, and the performance of a *mitzvah* or *aveirah* by any one of us affects us all. The spiritual health of our collective body thus depends on the wellbeing and functioning of each limb.

While the instructions in these *p’sukim* emphasize loving others, they also acknowledge that inappropriate behavior or unholy acts of another person call for *Tochecha*,



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corrective action and *tikun*. וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא עָלֶיךָ חַטָּאת “and do not carry sin on his account” implies that if we fail to speak out regarding destructive attitudes or behaviors, we can, in a sense, onboard that sin. However, as the order of verses shows, our call to mutual responsibility is sandwiched by *ahavas Yisrael*. When we communicate openly and with empathy, it allows us to stay clear and connected to Hashem, and to maintain our relationship with the other person without weighing it down with harshness or blame. It also keeps us from picking up and carrying the burden of a sin that could have been prevented.

Ultimately, וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר, we must not hold a grudge, and וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ we must love them, for an individual who has sinned is deserving of love and cannot be defined by their error or wrongdoing. This includes ourselves — we should never hold a grudge, even against ourselves, for our errors.

The Alter Rebbe, in Tanya, 32, clarifies this:

שאף הרחוקים מתורת ה' ועבודתו... צריך למשכן בחבלי עבותות אהבה, וכולי האי ואולי יוכל לקרוב לתורה ועבודת ה', והן לא, לא הפסיד שכר מצות אהבת רעים

“Those who are far from God’s Torah and service... must be drawn close *with strong bonds of love*...” Thus, the mitzvah ‘to love’ and the mitzvah ‘to hate’ can co-exist. It is a mitzvah to hate *the evil* that exists within a person, while loving the hidden spark of Godliness that resides within him.

וְלֹא-תִקֶּם וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר, ‘not taking revenge nor

bearing a grudge’, suggests a methodology of ‘letting go’ and moving forward in bruised relationships — and a practical step in moving from ‘not hating’ to cultivating ‘love’. The Torah’s specific choice of language in this pasuk, כְּבִי עַמֶּךָ, “members of your people”, focuses our attention upon the fact that each and every Jew is “my dear brother” or sister. A well-known parable is first expressed in the Talmud Yerushalmi: ‘If one were to accidentally cut their hand with a knife, can we imagine that a sane and healthy person would cut the other hand in retribution?’ Taking seriously the *issur* of taking revenge and the *aveira* of bearing a grudge, enables us to live day to day with the Arizal’s teaching that all Jews are members of the same sacred body.

The Kopitschnitzer Rebbe, Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heschel zy’a, would say that the mitzvah of *V’ahavta* does not refer to loving tzadikim, for it is impossible *not* to love good, kind, righteous people. Therefore, the commandment is to love those who are difficult to love. *V’Ahavta* applies to those with whom we strongly disagree, people who choose to live very differently than we do, or who seem to have opposing values and worldviews.

The Baal Shem Tov has revealed that *ahavas Yisrael* is the first portal that leads into the courtyard of Hashem’s palace. May we be *zoche*, have the merit, to enter this gate — and to reveal the spark of Godliness in one another! ■

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