

Mishpatim

One of the preeminent commandments *Hashem* implores us to perform is the somewhat elusive and nebulous *mitzvah* to be holy. It is *Hashem's* desire for *Am Yisrael* to attain an exalted level – at which time we will be like Him, as the *Torah* teaches – “You shall be holy because I am holy.” (Vayikra 19:2) This *mitzvah* is an introductory command later in the *Torah* and it is understandably given to all of *Bnei Yisrael* together.

With this in mind, a *pasuk* (22:30) in our *parsha* becomes increasingly curious. We are taught that we must not eat the flesh of any animal that was torn by animals. Instead of eating it, we are told to discard the meat by giving it to dogs to consume since the meat is forbidden to us. The reason given by *Hashem* that we cannot consume this meat is because we are a holy people. *Rashi* explains that *Anshei Kodesh*, holy people, are people who don't eat *neveilot*, carcasses of kosher animals that did not have appropriate *shechita*, and *treifot*, animals that were slaughtered properly but were discovered to have a mortal condition. *Rashi* continues that the meat is given specifically to the dogs as a reward for not barking as we left Egypt.

The *Daat Zkeinim* also wonders why the *Torah* specifies dogs and not other animal recipients. The scenario the *Daat Zkeinim* suggests is that of a shepherd's guard dog, who failed to save the sheep from attack. In this scenario, the *Torah* commands us to provide the *neveila* to the guard dog.

Why in this situation should the shepherd reward the guard dog for failing at his job? Usually rewards and treats are given after successes? The *Torah* here is teaching us a crucial, yet often ignored, aspect of the *middah* of *Hakaras Hatov* - just because the dog messed up one time, should not mean that we ignore all the other times it served its master loyally.

Hashem intentionally wants the shepherd to reward the dog at that point so he does not deny the goodness done for him so many times before. *Hashem* is imploring us to keep everything in perspective.

In quickly reviewing the *parsha*, we might quickly skim over this important point believing it to be highly irrelevant. The insight of the *Daas Zkeinim* testifies to its relevance. We are all beneficiaries of many people's graciousness, kindness and outright chesed. When they are assisting us and are helpful, we are grateful. When we feel they are acting appropriately or are doing their job, we applaud and appreciate their actions.

However, too often, when we feel they fail to meet the standard set for them – we shut them out of our lives.

The *gemara* at the end of the first *perek* of *Sotah* (14a) says that the *Torah* both begins and ends with *Hashem's Chesed* – it begins with *Hashem* giving clothing to *Adam* and *Chava* and ends with *Hashem* burying *Moshe* at the end of his life, on *Har Nevo*.

We would think that the first act of *chesed* was creating the world. Why is that not the *chesed* mentioned by the *gemara*?

If we look at the context, we'll be able to understand. *Adam* and *Chava* had just sinned – they ate from the *Etz HaDaat* and were punished. Mankind's first couple were given one seemingly simple command – not to eat from the tree of knowledge – and they couldn't even do that.

And immediately afterwards, G-d clothes them. *Hashem's* act was an act of *Chesed* after wrongdoing – a much higher level.

That's why the *gemara* emphasized this example.

The *Torah* teaches us to ignore one misdeed and instead focus on the good. This lesson applies to all of our relationships.

I'm not sure why this is – is it because we're less grateful, maybe we're desensitized because we have so much, is it because we expect perfection more? I'm not certain but I've encountered many people who once you've wronged them, you've made a mistake with them, you have negatively affected them – you're done, you're shut out. You misspoke, 1 misstep, you are done.

The *Torah* is teaching us that that approach, that line of thinking, is not our way.

Many of us feel let down by others. Some of us may even direct that feeling towards heaven. We might feel let down by aspects of our lives and we question or are angry at *Hashem*. Those feelings are normal. Those feelings should not be ignored. However, all the good and the blessings mustn't be forgotten as well. They are all part of the relationship we have with others as well as *Hashem*.

We will be put down, marginalized, ignored, nudged out of the way, embarrassed and hurt – but that doesn't mean those relationships need to be severed.

We give the guard dog the piece of meat to demonstrate I still appreciate all you've done before and I trust you'll continue to help.

May we be *zoche* to contemplate, cherish, appreciate and grow from each of the very precious relationships we have in our own lives.

Shabbat Shalom