

I. Summary

A. Achieving a High Spiritual Level. The Children of Israel were told to be “kedoshim” (of an elevated holy nature). To help them achieve this goal, a number of laws are discussed. They include laws designed to achieve holiness, including:

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| 1. respecting one's parents | 4. not mutilating or tattooing one's body | 6. not eating the fruits of a tree for the first 3 years after planting |
| 2. observing the Shabbos | 5. not causing irregular mixtures, such as interbreeding of animals, and interweaving of wool and linen (“sha’atnes”) | |
| 3. not engaging in idol worship, witchcraft and human sacrifice | | |

B. Laws to encourage compassion towards others (particularly the stranger and the poor), including:

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| 1. leaving a corner of the field and stray gleanings for the poor | 5. judging others favorably | 11. saving the life of another who is in danger |
| 2. dealing honestly with others (e.g., not stealing, lying, etc.) | 6. not taking another's possession without his/her permission | 12. admonishing an erring fellow man |
| 3. a shopkeeper ensuring the accuracy of his weights/scales | 7. not withholding a worker's wages | 13. not embarrassing another |
| 4. a judge being impartial | 8. not giving harmful advice | 14. not taking revenge or holding a grudge |
| | 9. not defaming others | 15. “loving one's fellow man as one loves oneself” |
| | 10. not misleading a blind or naive person | |

C. Laws respecting impermissible relationships (e.g., adultery, incest and bestiality)

II. Divrei Torah

A. LilMode U’Lilamed (Rabbi Mordechai Katz)

- **Loving Thy Neighbor.** When a gentile told Hillel that he would convert if Hillel could explain the entire Torah while standing on one foot, Hillel responded: “Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you”. But, isn’t this a lower standard than the one dictated by the Torah (i.e., that one must love another as one loves oneself)? Hillel understood that the Torah’s ideal is a difficult one, but that by using a step-by-step approach (i.e., by starting by avoiding negative acts), one can work towards carrying out positive acts of love.
- **Admonishing Others.** We are told to admonish another who is erring since we are responsible for each other. This is a sign of true love — helping others when they are in any kind of danger.

B. Love Thy Neighbor (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

- **Living Among People.** Hashem told Moshe to speak to the “entire congregation of the Children of Israel . . .” Hashem commanded Moshe to state this verse to the entire congregation because the majority of the essentials of Torah are summarized here. To attain holiness, one need not be isolated and withdrawn; to the contrary, the admonition was stated in an assembly to show that we must learn to sanctify ourselves by behaving properly among people. (Chasam Sofer)

C. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

- **Introspect to gain self-knowledge to strengthen areas that need strengthening.** This Parsha teaches that must fear our “mother and father”. Cf. the Ten Commandments which teach that we must honor our “father and mother”. Why is the order reversed in these two references? Since human nature is more likely to fear our father and honor our mother. Introspection allows us to gain greater self-awareness of our natural tendencies and to make an effort to behave in a manner that will strengthen those areas which need strengthening.
- **Only rebuke others with a sincere concern for their welfare.** “You shall rebuke your fellow man”. Rebuke must come from the depths of the heart (as Chazal teach, only words which come from the heart enter the heart). Before correcting another, we must search for our true motives — is it coming from our heart or for other reasons (e.g., desiring a feeling of power)?
- **Loving Your Fellow Man As Yourself**
 - **Feel love for other people because it is Hashem’s wish.** We are commanded to do so whether it is easy or difficult. Once, while delivering a lecture, Rabbi Pliskin was “interrupted” by a cute dog who entered a room, causing his audience to smile and shower admiration on the dog. Rabbi Pliskin noted that despite the fact that no one had previously seen the dog, everyone had a positive feeling toward it. If we do so with the dog, how much more so should we do so with other people?! By internalizing the awareness that each person is created in Hashem’s image and that Hashem wishes us to love each other, we can learn to have this positive attitude towards our fellow man as well.
 - **Share your Torah knowledge.** “Love your fellow man as yourself.” The Chasem Sofer explains that this means that we are obligated to take time from our Torah studies to teach others Torah. We must constantly look for opportunities to share our Torah knowledge with others.
 - **Your behavior towards others should be a manifestation of your love towards them.** Why didn’t Hillel simply repeat the words from the Torah (see above)? R’ Yeruchem Levovitz explains that this teaches us an important principle — from the words “love your fellow man” one might think that one fulfills the obligation by feeling the emotion of love; but just feeling love isn’t sufficient. Rather, the love must motivate us to do positive things for others and refrain from any actions or words that could cause someone pain or suffering.

D. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

- **The responsibility of holiness.** “Speak unto the entire congregation of Israel and say unto them, You shall be holy, because I, your G-d, am holy.” Rashi notes that whereas at other times Moshe’s teachings were given to the Elders to transmit to the populace, this time he gathered all the people to hear the words directly from him. Why was this message so important that every Israelite man, woman and child had to hear it firsthand? These words have a two-fold meaning: (a) “You shall be holy” (i.e., Israel was commissioned by G-d to be a unique nation, and this commission carries with it great responsibility); and (b) as a statement of fact, “You are holy” (i.e., each Jew is composed of a unique soul which partakes of G-d’s holiness). This dual meaning is interrelated — because of what we are we must do our utmost to become all that we can be.
- **The infinity of Divine Holiness.** “You shall be holy, because I, your G-d, am holy.” The Midrash comments, “My [G-d’s] holiness is superior to your holiness.” Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev inserts a comma so that the verse reads: “My holiness is superior, as a result of your holiness.” How can G-d’s holiness possibly

increase? The Bal Shem Tov was once approached by a disciple who complained that he was unable to come closer to G-d. "Each time I feel that I am approaching closer to Him, I find myself father away than ever." The Bal Shem Tov replied with an example: "When a parent wishes to teach his/her child to walk, he/she waits until the child is sufficiently developed to be able to stand firmly, and he/she then places him/herself close to the child, and stretches out his/her arms within inches of the child. Although the child is afraid to move lest he lose his balance and fall, the closeness of his parent's protective arms combined with his desire to reach his parent encourages him to take the first step. When this is accomplished, the parent retreats another step, and continues to beckon the child to come. As this process is continued, the child learns to walk. "What is going on here," the child is undoubtedly thinking, "Each time I make a greater effort to reach my parent, he/she distances his/herself more and more from me." What is actually happening is that the parent and child have disparate goals. The child's goal is to reach the parent, whereas the parent's goal is to teach the child to walk. Allowing the child to reach him/her too soon would terminate the learning process. "Your situation is quite similar," said the Bal Shem Tov. "You wish to reach G-d. However, G-d's goal is for you to learn how to search for Him, because that is how you grow in spirituality. If He were to allow you to reach Him as you desire, your growth would come to an end." This is the meaning of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's comment. When we begin to develop a relationship with G-d, our concept of His greatness is limited. As we enhance our spirituality, we have an ever-increasing awareness of the infinity of G-d's greatness. Thus, it is our perception of the holiness of G-d that increases as our own holiness increases.

E. In the Garden of the Torah (the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, z'tl)

- **Finding the G-dly core.** Being holy means that "all of our deeds are for the sake of Heaven" (Pirke Avos). We must not be fixated with superficial material aspects of the world and ignore its G-dly core.
- **Involvement, not abstention.** The Torah demands not abstention, but that we interact with our environment and permeate it with holiness. Thus, this Parsha deals not primarily with rituals, but with concerns shared by all people — agriculture, human relations, business, etc. — for it is these "mundane" areas that the holiness of the Jewish people is to be expressed.
- **Acharei and Kedoshim.** As noted above, Acharei focuses on the "afterwards" — that the bond with Hashem should not be an insular experience, but should continue and spread outwards. Kedoshim highlights the possibility of living a life connected to Hashem amidst the realities of ordinary existence. To do so, one must focus on the G-dly life force which maintains existence and is manifest in its physical elements — this enables us to infuse holiness into every aspect of our life.

F. Peninim on the Torah (Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum)

- **Collective holiness.** "Speak to the entire assembly of B'nei Yisrael and say to them to be holy." Why was each member of K'lal Yisrael required to be present to hear this instruction? Horav E. Munk, z'tl notes that this teaches us that the ideal goal of holiness can only be achieved through the collective efforts of all K'lal Yisrael. We cannot achieve holiness in isolation or solitude; it requires interaction with others. Divrei Shaarei Hayyim also notes that this reminds us that we cannot be holy merely in the privacy of our home, but ashamed of our faith in public. We must be holy "in full assembly," in public, out in the open, in society.

G. Kol Dodi on the Torah (Rabbi David Feinstein)

- **Hashem keeps His promise.** The Torah prohibits eating or otherwise benefiting from orlah, any fruit of the first three years after a tree has been planted. The fruit of the fourth year (neta revai) must be taken to Jerusalem and eaten there in a state of purity. Then, the Torah says that the fruit of the fifth year and onwards may be eaten normally and it promises that if we observe the restrictions of orlah, we will be blessed with abundant crops. Rashi comments that the verse ends with the words "I am Hashem, your G-d," to remind us that He can be trusted to fulfill His promises. Why would someone need special assurances on this point? If he observed this commandment and therefore reaped tangible benefits, he would need no assurances; if, however, he failed to realize any benefit, all assurances would be meaningless to him. The Torah is telling us not to harbor doubts about Hashem's promises. Even if His blessings come in ways that are not clearly obvious to us, Hashem never fails to keep every promise that He makes.

H. Wellsprings of Torah (Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman)

- **Be righteous in judging others.** When Nathan the Prophet came before King David to rebuke him, he told the King the story of a poor man who was robbed of his only lamb. Deeply affected by the report, David ordered the thief put to death. Only then did Nathan tell him that the story had only been a parable illustrating what David himself had done and that, in condemning the alleged thief to death, David had pronounced his own sentence. (II Samuel, Chapter 12). G-d proceeds in a similar manner with any person due to be condemned to punishment for a transgression. His is told the story of his own sin in slightly disguised form, as if it had been committed by another person. When, outraged by the report, he harshly condemns the alleged sinner, he actually pronounces his own sentence. Thus, Ghazal teach, "judge thy fellow man with an inclination in his favor." As Rabbi Yisroel Salanter said, "When I first started learning mussar (moral/ethical teachings) I became angry at the whole world, but not at myself. Afterward, I became angry at myself also. Finally, I became angry only at myself and I judged the world "l'chaf zchus" [to the side of merit]."

I. A Lesson From Pirkei Avos

- **Introduction: Our Rabbis ordained that Pirkei Avos should be studied on the Shabbosos between Pesach and Shavuos in preparation for the giving of the Torah.** (The Alter Rebbe, z'tl and others initiated the custom of studying Pirkei Avos throughout the entire summer.) Thus, I've summarized below a few thoughts on Pirkei Avos from the Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, z'tl and the Pirkei Avos Treasury (Artscroll).
- **"Hillel says: Do not separate yourself from the community; do not believe in yourself until the day you die; do not judge a fellow until you have reached his place . . ." (Pirke Avos 2:5).**
 - **"Do not separate yourself from the community"** — One must participate emotionally [and physically] in the concerns of the community, bearing its pains and difficulties.
 - **"Do not believe in yourself until the day your die"**. Never rely on the fact that a good character trait is permanently ingrained in your personality. Until death, one must be afraid of ethical backsliding. (Rambam). As the Lubavitcher Rebbe, z'tl noted, without detracting from one's positive self-image, one must guard against overconfidence.
 - **"Do not judge a fellow until you have reached his place."** According to R'Yonah, this is a continuation of the previous clause: one should not believe that he is better able to withstand temptation than others who succumbed, for one never knows how one would react in the same predicament. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, z'tl notes that one should never criticize another until he establishes a commonality with him. Even when a person's conduct seems worth of reproof, one should not talk to him with a condescending attitude. By focusing instead on the essential connection which all people share, we can nurture the positive qualities in others and enable them to surface.