

Parshas Emor (and Acharei-Kedoshim)

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1. Well-Intended is Not Sufficient

The Torah states, **“Do not turn to idols, and molten gods shall you not make for yourself.”** Rambam in the Laws of Idolatry explains that this Negative Commandment can be transgressed in ways other than literally turning to idolatry. He states, “There are many works that were compiled regarding the service of idolatry – its actions and its rituals. G’d has commanded us not to read these works and not to contemplate or reflect on any aspect of them. Even to gaze upon and admire an image (of idolatry) is forbidden. As the verse states, **“Do not turn to idols...”** The Torah tells us that if one were to gaze upon these images eventually one will seek out “their gods...”

Rambam continues, “One may wish to investigate (out of intellectual curiosity) what is the nature of the beliefs of the nations of the world (since the majority of the world is pagan there must be some credence to their beliefs). Any level of association with these beliefs will cause one eventually to turn to “their gods.” All the Negative Commandments, which pertain to idolatry, are so that the Jew should have no association with it – not to gaze upon it and not to be involved with it to any degree. These prohibitions do not only apply to idolatry itself; but also, any other concept that may undermine any of the tenets of the Torah. One is not permitted to be distracted by any of these beliefs or considerations because the human mind is limited (finite) and vulnerable. One is not able to discern (in the absolute sense) what is true or what is false.” G’d does not want the Jew to be involved in idolatry or idolatrous thoughts to any degree because one does not know to what degree that he may be affected.

Daas Zikainim Baali Tosfos explain the juxtaposition of, **“You shall be holy...”** to **“Do not turn to idols...”** One may believe that it would be permitted to explore other religions or beliefs (although they may be pagan) in order to better appreciate the truth of Judaism. [In fact, one may believe that exploring other beliefs with the intent of increasing one’s faith in Hashem is the equivalent of creating a setting to perform a mitzvah (*hechsher mitzvah*).] However, this is not the case. Even if one’s intent is to explore other beliefs for the sole purpose of strengthening his own belief in G’d, the Jew is not permitted because this is contrary to the Commandment “You shall be holy.” The exploration of other beliefs will detract from one’s holiness.

Although one may say that the manner in which Yisro came upon monotheism was through his exploration and worshipping of all the deities (and only then coming upon the truth of G’d). This has no relevance to what the Torah is teaching us. Yisro was not a Jew and did not have the Commandment of **“You shall be holy...”**

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that at one time the Rabbis wanted to include in the daily morning service the recitation of the Ten Commandments. As Rav Sadia Gaon explains, the Ten Commandments themselves allude to all 613 mitzvos of the Torah. However soon after the Rabbis instituted this practice they realized that it was a grave error. It would ultimately undermine Torah Judaism. The Sadducees were a sect of Jews that only believed in the

authenticity of the Written Law and denied the Oral interpretation. After the Ten Commandments became an integral part of the service, the Sadducees used this legislation of the Rabbis as a proof and confirmation for their position of belief - that only the Written Law is the authentic word of G'd. Therefore, the Rabbis retracted and rescinded this legislation. They ruled that the Ten Commandments should not be included in the daily service – despite the fact their original intent was only to strengthen one's belief in G'd. Thus, we see that although the initial intent of the Rabbis was to strengthen Torah Judaism – ultimately they recognized that this would have undermined the Torah itself.

Even if one believes that by exploring other beliefs for the sake of G'd would strengthen his belief in Hashem, the Torah tells us **“You shall be holy...and do not turn to idols”** – in order to communicate to us that regardless of one's intent it would ultimately compromise his state of holiness.

2. Experiencing the Value of being Less Indulgent

The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying – Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G'd.”**

Rashi cites the Toras Kohanim, which states, “The Portion of Kiddoshim was said in the presence of the ‘entire assembly of the Children of Israel’ because the majority of the principles in the Torah are dependent on the concept of ‘You shall be holy.’” Seemingly, the Toras Kohanim is telling us that one must be within the context of holiness (kiddushah) whenever he performs a mitzvah. However, the Midrash Tanchuma elucidates this passage giving us another level of understanding of the mitzvah of “You shall be holy.”

The Midrash Tanchuma asks, “Why does the Portion of Kiddoshim begin with the passage: “Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel”? Why is it not similar to all of the other Portions in the Torah which simply state, “Hashem spoke to Moshe saying – speak to the Children of Israel? Why does this Portion specifically need to be presented to the entire Jewish community? It is because all of the Ten Commandments are alluded to in this Portion. For example, it is stated in the Ten Commandments, “I am Hashem Your G'd...” In this Portion the Torah states, “I am Hashem Your G'd.” In the Ten Commandments it is stated, “You shall not have false gods...” In this Portion it states, “Do not turn to the idols...” The Ten Commandments state, “Do not take a false oath.” In this Portion it states, “Do not be false to one another.” The Midrash continues to correlate each of the Ten Commandments with one of the verses in the Portion of Kedoshim. This is the reason this Portion must be communicated to the entire Jewish people. Just as every Jew stood at Sinai and heard the Ten Commandments, so too this Portion (which alludes to the Ten Commandments) must be communicated in the presence of the entire assembly.

Rav Sadia Gaon z'tl writes that the Ten Commandments themselves encapsulate the entire Torah. He demonstrates how all of the 613 precepts of the Torah are contained within the Ten Commandments.

It is interesting to note that the Portion that alludes to the Ten Commandments (and encapsulates the entire Torah) is predicated on the mitzvah of, **“Kiddoshim t’hue You shall be Holy...”** One can say that the mitzvah of being “holy” is an aspect of engaging in the service of G’d. Removing oneself from physicality in order to achieve holiness (a sense of spirituality) is an independent mitzvah. However, the Torah is communicating to us a greater understanding of the mitzvah of “You shall be holy.” Since the Portion, which alludes to the Ten Commandments (which is the equivalent of the entire Torah), is introduced with **“You shall be Holy...”** it is an indication that **“You shall be Holy...”** has relevance to every aspect of the Torah. For a Jew who achieves a state of kiddushah, the performance and processing of mitzvos is at another level than one who did not. In the context of kiddushah, when one fulfills the mitzvah of tefillin, it has a different impact on the individual and the world at large. If one is in a state of holiness, every mitzvah he performs is a different level of mitzvah. Thus, because of the infinite value of “you shall be holy” this entire portion needed to be presented before the entire Jewish people.

At Sinai, the Jewish people were commanded to separate themselves from their spouses for three days prior to the receiving of the Torah in order for them to be in a state of spiritual purity. Similarly, the Torah is predicating the Portion, which is the equivalent of the entire Torah, on the concept of purity and holiness - **“You shall be Holy...”** This is to teach us that one can only replicate the Sinai experience through - “You shall be holy.” If one wants to have relevance to the Torah and G’d at the most advanced level, one must wean himself from physicality to bring about holiness/kiddushah.

3. The Impact of Torah Study and Its Retention

The Torah tells us that when one brings a Thanks Offering (Korban Todah) to G’d it must be with the proper intent. It must be eaten within a specific time, which is the day period and the night that follows. One brings the Korban Todah in recognition and appreciation for surviving an extraordinary circumstance. It is brought after one traverses the desert or returns from a sea voyage safely. It is brought after the safe release from imprisonment or recovering from a serious illness. Thus, the Korban Todah was an indication of a level of clarity on the part of the individual who brought it - that he did not attribute his survival to happenstance. Although one may have had sufficient clarity to appreciate the moment and to bring the Korban Todah, one needs to continuously maintain and reinforce that clarity.

The Torah juxtaposes to the Korban Todah, **“You shall safeguard My Mitzvos and perform them - for I am Hashem.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “You shall safeguard My Mitzvos” refers to the study of Torah. “Performing them” is referring to the actualization of what one had studied. The Torah continues, **“You shall not desecrate My holy Name, rather it should be sanctified among the Children of Israel...”** Rashi explains, “One sanctifies the Name of G’d by being willing to give his life for His sake. Anyone who is willing to sacrifice himself and believes that Hashem will perform a miracle to save him - will not be saved. It is the one who truly is willing to give his life for G’d that can merit a miracle.” Being willing to give one’s life for the sake of G’d is a Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G’d’s Name). Why does the Torah juxtapose “You shall safeguard My Mitzvos” to the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem?

The one who is willing to give his life to sanctify G’d’s Name is one who has a level of clarity and

appreciates the value of giving his life. This is the individual who is engaged in Torah study and actualizes what he studies. The individual who studies Torah and engages in its mitzvos has the capacity to internalize the value of his own spirituality and the value of a mitzvah. It is he who has relevance to Kiddush Hashem because he can appreciate its value. King Solomon states in Proverbs, “Neir Mitzvah v’Torah ohr.” The candle is the mitzvah and the Torah is the light. It is only through the study of Torah that one comes upon clarity.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, “Whoever forgets anything of his Torah learning, Scripture considers it as if he bears guilt for his soul, for it is stated: “But be aware and guard your soul exceedingly lest you forget the things your eyes have seen (at Sinai).” If one were present at the time of the Sinai experience, it would be understandable that if he were to forget his Torah learning it would be that equivalent of forgetting what he saw with his own eyes. However, what relevance does the Mishna have to any other Jew who did not experience Sinai because they were not present?

Although we were not actually present at Sinai, through our Torah study and actualization of mitzvos, we are able to relate (through our mesorah - tradition transmitted from generation to generation) to that experience. The only way one can appreciate and sense the mesorah is to be engaged in Torah study. Thus, one who delves in Torah at a proper level, and retains that knowledge, experiences Sinai as if he saw it with his own eyes. Therefore, the individual who forgets his Torah learning because of his negligence is liable with his life. Sinai is only a reality for one who engages in Torah and retains its wisdom. Additionally one must study Torah with the intent of integrating it into every aspect of his life (*lilmod al minas laasos*). It is not simply an intellectual pursuit.

The reason the Torah juxtaposes the mitzvah of kiddush Hashem to the mitzvah of “you shall safeguard and observe My mitzvos” is to indicate that it is only the one who is fully engaged in Torah study and performing its mitzvos that can internalize its value and thus appreciate the sanctification of G’d’s Name.

4. The Symbolism of the Four Species of the Lulav

The Torah states regarding the four species one is obliged to take on the Festival of Succos, “**You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the citron tree (esrog), the branches of date palms (lulav), twigs of myrtle (hadas), and brook willows (aravos)...**” The Midrash Tanchuma explains the symbolism of the four species: “King Solomon in Proverbs states, ‘Listen My son and take My Commandments and they will be hidden with you...’ What is the meaning of ‘take My Commandments’? There are many situations in the Torah where the expression ‘take for yourself’ is used. Whenever the expression of ‘taking’ is used in the Torah, regarding an obligation, the fulfillment of that Commandment is for our own benefit. (For example, the Torah states, ‘Take for Me Terumah.’ The Torah should have written ‘Give to Me Terumah.’ Why then does the Torah use the expression ‘take’?” When one gives something, as commanded by the Torah, he is the beneficiary of that giving. Thus, he is in effect ‘taking’ for himself by ‘giving’.)

The Midrash continues, “When the Torah states (regarding the building of the Mishkan), ‘Take (for) Me Terumah’ it does not simply state ‘Take Terumah’ but rather it states ‘(for) Me.’ Meaning when one takes the Terumah (for the building for the Mishkan) one also takes G’d along with it.” The Midrash continues to explain that the four species that are taken on Succos represent various segments of the Jewish people – those who possess Torah and Mitzvos, those with Torah and are lacking in mitzvos, those who possess mitzvos and do not have Torah, and those who are devoid of mitzvos and Torah. The Commentators explain that although there is a segment of Jews who are devoid of Torah and mitzvos, they are still considered connected to the Jewish people because they identify themselves as Jews. The Midrash states regarding all of these segments of Jews, “All together you should be one grouping so that there should not be any blemish among any of My children. If you do as I instruct you, I will elevate you...”

Chazal explain that the symbolism of the binding of the four species is the equivalent of binding all of the segments of the Jewish people together – causing them to be seen as one entity.

Every mitzvah brings about a positive consequence. However, one’s intent will determine the degree of that consequence. The binding of the lulav together with the other species generates an effect that causes a binding of the Jewish people together. Even the rasha (evil person) is affected and subsumed through this unification of all of these entities. Seemingly, if one has an understanding of each of the species of the lulav and binds them together with the intent of unifying all of the segments of the Jewish people (as G’d wants – He does not want to see a blemish in His Children) then the effect of the mitzvah has a greater impact.

The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us the consequence of the bringing the Omer offering (grain offering), which was comprised of the new barley grain, is to bring blessing to the grain that is in the field. The consequence of the bringing water libations on Succos is that there should be rains of blessing (*gishmai beracha*). In every instance Hashem asks the Jew to bring offerings not for His sake but rather for the sake of the Jew. We as a Jewish people are especially beneficiaries of G’d’s blessing when we are united as one people. This is the value of binding the four species of the lulav on Succos. Every Jew becomes intertwined with his fellow.

Reb Yisroel Salanter z’tl would say that if a Jew speaks lashon hara (negative speech with no value), in Vilna a Jew in Brisk would transgress the Shabbos. Every Jew affects his fellow – in the negative as well as in the positive. Thus, when an individual engages in Torah study and perform mitzvos, the entire Jewish people are elevated and advanced because of his investment.

5. The Malady of Passivity

The Torah tells us that the ox, sheep, and goat are the species that qualify for sacrifices (Korbanos). The Midrash Tanchuma cites a verse from Yeshaya, “You come from nothing and your accomplishment emanates from an outcry and you have chosen an abomination.” The Midrash explains “You come from nothing” refers to the fact that among the nations of the world the Jewish people are considered special. As the Prophet states, “All the nations of the world are like nothing before Him.”

The Midrash continues “your accomplishment comes from an outcry” means that all the blessings, consolations, and good tidings that will come upon the Jewish people until the end of time are as a result of their singular outcry at Sinai. Unlike the nations of the world, the Jewish people declared their unequivocal acceptance of the Torah at Sinai by saying, “*Naaseh V’nishma* – we will do and we will listen.” The Midrash continues, “However soon after your outcry you chose an abomination (the Golden Calf). From this abomination I (Hashem) want you to bring for Me an offering.” Despite the fact that the calf was utilized in a setting of idolatry/ the Golden Calf, G’d chose the calf (ox) to be one of the species that qualifies as an offering. In fact, it is the first of the species that is mentioned to qualify as a korban. The verse continues, “It is through it (the calf) that I will choose you (the Jewish people). As a result of their evil the King will rejoice and through their falseness the heavenly ministers will rejoice.” What is the meaning of this?

The Midrash explains, “Why did Hashem mention the ox (calf) as the first species that qualifies for a korban (sacrifice)? Reb Levi says that this can be understood through an allegory. A rumor had spread through the kingdom that a certain matronly woman had committed adultery with one of the ministers of the king. The king investigated the claim and discovered that it was unfounded. He wished to vindicate the minister. In order to do this, the king hosted a banquet for all of his subjects and placed the minister (the suspected adulterer) at the head of the table next to the king. Those who attended the banquet, witnessing the honor afforded to the minister by the king, understood that there was no basis for the claim. Similarly, the nations of the world could say, “the Jewish people are idolaters like us because they failed with idolatry at Sinai.” G’d revealed to the world through his understanding of fact that this accusation was unfounded. The Jewish people themselves were not involved in the actual idolatry. This is proven through G’d’s choice of the ox to be the first species mentioned to qualify as a sacrifice to be brought in the Temple. Thus, the Jewish people were not guilty of idolatry and the ox should not be considered an object of idolatry.”

The Midrash proves through a verse in the Torah that the Jewish people were not actually involved in the Sin of the Golden Calf, “They had said, ‘This is your god - Israel.’” If the Jewish people had initiated the Golden Calf and accepted it as their deity the verse should have stated, “This is our god.” Since the verse states ‘This is your god’ it is an indication that it was the rabble (that had left Egypt along with the Jewish people) that had made and worshipped the Golden Calf. The Jewish people themselves did not worship the Calf. Eitz Yosef (commentary on Midrash Tanchumah) explains that the failure of the Jewish people was that they did not protest and detest the behavior of the rabble. They stood silent. This was the claim against the Jewish people – not that they were idolaters.

The silence and passivity of the Jewish people is what is considered as “trampling upon that which was precious.” The silence of the Jews was a Chilul Hashem (desecration of G’d’s Name) – allowing such an abomination to take place in their midst immediately after hearing the Ten Commandments. They had heard directly from G’d, “I am the Hashem Your G’d...Thou shall not make graven images...” Nevertheless, they remained silent and did not protest.

A claim that can be made against the Jew today is that he is oblivious to many events that surround him. Just as they stood silently at Sinai while the Golden Calf was being cast and worshipped, so too we remain silent and do not react to the Chilul Hashem that exists in the our communities and the world at large.

When we hear about the tragedies that occur almost daily in Israel do we respond by examining ourselves and reflecting on what we could do to make a difference? Or do we continue with our lives without any consideration or minimal reaction? If a Jew does not take upon himself the task of upgrading and advancing his level of spirituality through Torah study and perfecting his performance of mitzvos, it is like the silent indifference of the Jews at Sinai.

6. Shavuos the Concealed Holiday

The Kli Yakar points out that there are two festivals/holidays that are mentioned by the Torah whose essence is concealed. The holiday of Shavuos, which is the time of our nationhood when the Jewish people received the Torah at Sinai, and Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment. Both are identified as something other than what they are. The Torah does not explicitly identify these holidays as it does regarding Pesach (Passover), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), and Succos (Festival commemorating the clouds of glory, which offered the Jews protection). Regarding Shavuos, the Torah does not even mention that it was the time of the receiving of the Torah; rather it states, “**...you shall count fifty days and you shall offer a new (chadash) meal offering to Hashem...**” It is also referred to as the Festival of the bringing of the new produce. Similarly, the Torah does not refer to Rosh Hashanah as *Yom HaDin* (Day of Judgment) but rather it states, “**yom teruah – day of the Shofar blast...**” One would think that the Festival of Shavuos, which is one of the most important days in our history – the day the Jewish people became a nation and received the Torah – would have been identified in a more explicit manner by the Torah. Additionally, one would think that Torah would have alluded to the gravity of Rosh Hashanah, which is the day that G’d judges the world and decides its fate for the coming year. Nevertheless, the Torah chooses to conceal the essence of these two holidays. Kli Yakar asks why.

He explains that all meal offerings that were brought in the Temple were matzah (not chometz / leavened). The only two meal offerings that were chometz/leavened was the meal offering of the two loaves of wheat bread brought on Shavuos and the Todah offering (thanks offering). Chazal tell us that the leavening process represents the evil inclination. (One would think that the meal offering brought on Shavuos would be *matzah* and not leavened. Since Shavuos is the time of the receiving of the Torah when the Jewish people had reached the pinnacle of their spirituality and overcame the Evil Inclination, it seems contradictory that the meal offering that is brought on that day be leavened.) Kli Yakar asks why.

Accordingly, he explains the reason the Torah conceals the fact that Shavuos is the time the Jewish people received the Torah is to communicate that there is no specific time set for a Jew to study Torah. The obligation of Torah study is ongoing and continuous – throughout the day and night. Every moment has relevance to the study of Torah. Thus, the Torah does not want to designate a specific time for the study of Torah by explicitly revealing that Shavuos is the time of the receiving of the Torah.

A further explanation that Kli Yakar offers for the reason the Torah refers to the meal offering brought on Shavuos as a “**new (chadash) meal offering,**” is to allude to the fact that the

Torah that one studies must remain *chadash/new*. One must experience mitzvos and Torah study every day as if he had received it at Sinai that day. If Torah and mitzvos do not retain their newness and vibrancy, the person would eventually become tired and disgusted with them – thus abandoning them. Therefore, one must continuously internalize and appreciate the preciousness of Torah.

He explains the reason the Torah conceals that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment is to communicate to us that one must introspect and reflect on his actions every day as it were the Day of Judgment. There is no set designated time when one must reflect on his behavior and do teshuvah (repent). As Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) tells us, no one knows when his last moment will come. Thus, one must always be in a state of teshuvah. Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah cites King Solomon who states, “All your life your clothing should be white.” Meaning, one must maintain a continuous state of purity through the teshuvah process/reflection and introspection.

Why is the offering brought on Shavuos leavened (chometz) and not matzah? The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin states, “I (Hashem) created the *yetzer hara* (*the evil inclination*) and the Torah as its antidote.” The Torah is the only mechanism that can subdue and defuse the evil inclination. By commanding us to bring a meal offering that is leavened on Shavuos, the Torah is communicating to us that – it is true that man has an evil inclination (as symbolized by the chometz) but as long as one engages in its antidote – the Torah – one does not need to be concerned. It is the choice of every individual to study Torah and fulfill its precepts to keep the evil inclination in check.

With this understanding, we are able to appreciate the Gemara in Tractate Eruvin, which tells us that if one has any difficulty in life, one should study Torah in order to eliminate it. When there are difficulties, it is only an indication that one needs to correct and rehabilitate his spirituality. The only way one can gain understanding and clarity of the issue is to study the Torah.

7. Appreciating the Attribute of Justice

The Torah states, “**Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron’s two sons...**” Rashi cites Reb Elazar Ben Azarya who asks, “Why is it important for the Torah to juxtapose the death of the sons of Aaron with the law which states that even the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) is not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies other than on Yom Kippur?” Reb Elazar answers, “It is comparable to one who is ill and is instructed by his doctor neither to eat foods that are cold nor to sleep in a damp location so as not to die like the patient before him who did not heed the words of the doctor. The instructions given by the doctor to the second patient have a greater impact than those given to the first because he understands through example the consequence of not heeding the directive of the doctor. Therefore, when Hashem instructed Aaron not to enter the Holy of Holies, with the exception of Yom Kippur, that warning was predicated on the death of his children. He had witnessed the consequence of entering the Holy of Holies without permission.”

The words of Reb Elazar Ben Azarya are difficult to understand. Did Aaron, who was the spiritual equivalent of his brother Moshe, need a real life example in order to appreciate the consequences of violating the word of G'd? Had his sons not died before he was told that it was forbidden to enter the Holy of Holies, would he have considered violating the law by entering? Seemingly, Aaron needed to learn this lesson from the death of his sons.

The Midrash Tanchumah cites a verse from Koheles (Ecclesiastes) - King Solomon states, "The same happenings which befall the tzaddik (righteous) befall the rasha (evil) - for the one who is pure and for the one who is contaminated, for the one who is good and for the sinner..." The Midrash continues, "King Solomon gazed upon all the generations regarding the righteous and evil people and he saw that what comes upon the rasha comes upon the tzaddik (They both die). This is the most evil that takes place under the Sun."

The Gemara tells us that Rebbi Akiva was one of the ten martyrs who was brutally murdered by the Romans. He was tortured and put to death in the cruelest manner. In fact, the Midrash tells us that after he had his flesh scathed off his body, the Romans sold his flesh in the meat market. He was disgraced on the extreme level. Did Rebbi Akiva deserve to experience such a fate? Why did Hashem allow such a tragic end to befall such a holy person?

There is a principle, "G'd is exacting with his Tzaddikim (Righteous) as much as a hairs-breadth." Meaning, Hashem punishes the tzaddik for even the minutest infraction because of his level of piety. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh cites an Avos D'Reb Nosson, which tells us that when Rebbi Akiva gave a Talmudic discourse to 600,000 Jews he experienced a moment of pride and joy that he had an opportunity to impart Torah to so many Jews. Because of this pride, Rebbi Akiva deserved to be put to death in the cruelest manner.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, "If Rebbi Akiva experienced a moment of pride when lecturing to 600,000 Jews, is that sufficient reason to suffer to such a degree? If this is so, then one could conclude that the more one engages in mitzvos and perfects himself spiritually, the more likely he would meet such a fate. However, this is incorrect. Rather, this is the manner in which the Attribute of Justice functions." In order for the Attribute of Justice to exact punishment on an individual there must be a claim against the individual who is to be prosecuted. Under normal circumstances, the Attribute of Mercy protects the individual from the prosecution of the Attribute of Justice, despite the fact that he has many infractions on his record. However because G'd holds the tzaddik to such a high standard because of his degree piety, even the slightest infraction allows the Attribute of Justice to prosecute. The moment a tzaddik behaves in a manner that is unbecoming or inappropriate for an individual of his caliber, he is subject to prosecution. For one to have taken pride in disseminating Torah to 600,000 Jews is something that is in itself not wrong; however, for a person such as Rebbi Akiva it was considered inappropriate. Thus, he was subject to prosecution.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues to explain that when G'd takes the life of a tzaddik it is considered "Precious in the eyes of Hashem because it is the shield and the protection for all generations to come." However, G'd does not allow prosecution to come upon the tzaddik unless he has some degree of failing - even if it is as much as an iota.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that Reb Yehuda HaNassi (Judah the Prince) suffered excruciating pain from a stone that was located in his urinary tract for a period of thirteen years. This came about through an incident that involved a calf that was about to be slaughtered. The calf had run to seek protection from the ritual slaughter in the cloak of Judah the Prince. Rather than showing compassion for the calf, he stated, “Go to your slaughter for that is why you were created.” This precipitated his affliction. This condition did not pass until he demonstrated compassion by retrieving a litter of cats that was swept into the street by his maidservant.

Judah the Prince is referred to as Rabbeinu HaKadosh (Our Holy Teacher). The only other person who is referred to with the appellation of “Rabbeinu – our teacher” is Moshe Rabbeinu. Judah the Prince was the person who had committed the Oral Law to writing in order to preserve it for posterity. Because of his advanced level of spirituality, it was inappropriate for him to express himself and not show sufficient compassion – even to a calf. He was thus vulnerable to prosecution. His suffering was considered “precious” in the eyes of G’d because it provided the protection that was needed by the Jewish people.

The sons of Aaron deserved to die when they entered the Holy of Holies not because the infraction itself deserved the death penalty; but rather, because they were at such an advanced level of spirituality that the Attribute of Justice of G’d was exacting. As Moshe stated, “They (the sons of Aaron) are greater than we are because it was through them that Hashem sanctified His Name.” Since G’d chose to use the sons of Aaron to exhibit His Justice, it was a confirmation that they were the most special.

Through the death of his sons, Aaron needed to understand the consequence of entering the Holy of Holies at the inappropriate time because based on the prohibition alone he might not have believed that it would warrant such a serious consequence. However, once he had witnessed the death of his sons, he understood the concept of “precious in the eyes of Hashem is the death of those who are most devout.” Thus, he understood that under no circumstance could it be justified to enter into the Holy of Holies at a time that he was not commanded to do so.

8. Sensing Spirituality and Holiness

The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying – Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G’d.”** It is a Positive Commandment for a Jew to make himself holy (Kaddosh). Rashi explains that for one to assume the status of “kaddosh,” one must separate himself from forbidden sexual relationships and from other areas of transgression. The result of separating oneself from forbidden relationships and distancing oneself through Fences that were established by the Chachamim (Rabbis) brings about Kiddushah (holiness). Rashi cites Chazal who explain that this mitzvah was given in the presence of the entire Jewish people because the majority of the fundamentals of Torah are dependent upon this.

Ramban explains the mitzvah of, **“You shall be holy”** is not referring to separating oneself from that which is forbidden (as explained by Rashi); but rather, “one should sanctify himself in

areas that are permitted to him (by the Torah).” One only has relevance to kiddushah when one weans himself from the physical and the mundane that is permitted to him. For example, the Torah permits one to engage in sexual relations in a permitted context such as with one’s wife. The Torah permits one to eat and drink foods that conform to the dietary laws. However if one indulges in these areas as a hedonist, although he did not violate the areas in which he is involved, this manner of behavior is the antithesis of kiddushah and has no relevance to spirituality. One can have a sense of Hashem – the Omnipotent Being – only if one is less involved in the physical. Thus, the Torah gives the Jew a Positive Commandment in order to spiritualize himself by removing himself from even that which is permitted to him for the sake of having a relationship with G’d.

The Gemara tells us that one who in addition to being meticulous in the performance of mitzvos, would eat even non-consecrated food (chulin) in a state of spiritual purity, was classified as “Chaver”. Although the Torah does not prohibit one to eat non-consecrated food in a state of purity, the Chaver established a Fence for himself to be cognizant of the state of purity of what he eats so that he should not transgress the law which prohibits one from eating consecrated food in an impure state. The Aam HaAretz was a classification of individual who was not meticulous in mitzvah observance because he did not establish self-imposed Fences in order to avoid transgression. They would eat non-consecrated food (chulin) in a state of impurity, as is permitted by the Torah. However, ultimately, it led to the transgression of even the Torah law.

One can only have an appreciation for spirituality and holiness if one removes himself from physicality/the material. The Chaver was sensitive to spirituality because he separated himself even from that which was permitted to him. The Torah commands the Jew to establish for himself a spiritual environment and setting in order to have an appreciation for and relationship with G’d. It is not enough for one to distance himself from that which is forbidden; one cannot allow himself to indulge in physicality, despite the fact that he is not transgressing.

9. Love Your Fellow as Yourself

The Torah states, **“You shall not hate your brother in your heart...you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.”** Rashi cites Rabbi Akiva who states, “You shall love your fellow as yourself” is the most fundamental principle of the Torah.” Rabbi Akiva’s level and depth of understanding of the Torah was one of a kind. The Gemara explains that his level of genius was so profound that it was the equivalent of one being able to uproot mountains and grind them with one another (together). Why did Rabbi Akiva, through his depth of understanding, state that this is the most fundamental principle that encompasses the entire Torah?

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that a non-Jew who wished to convert approached Hillel for the sake of conversion on the condition that he is taught one principle that encompasses the entire Torah. Hillel responded, “What you dislike, do not do unto your fellow.” This is the

equivalent of **'you shall love your fellow as yourself.'** Hillel explained to the convert that the remainder of the Torah was only the commentary on this principle.

The Gemara at the end of Tractate Makos tells us that the Torah is comprised of 613 mitzvos (248 Positive Commandments and 365 Negative Commandments). There are many mitzvos that are particular to specific segments of Jews, which do not apply to others. For example, all the laws regarding the Kohen's service in the Temple only have relevance to the Kohen (Priest). They do not apply to the non-Kohen. The Positive Commandment of contaminating oneself with the dead (if it is not one of the seven closest relatives) only has relevance to the non-Kohen. The laws pertaining the service of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) or Yom Kippur have relevance only to him. If so, then how could any one Jew fulfill the entire Torah which is comprised of 613 mitzvos when many of them do not apply to him?

There is a concept cited in many works that the entire Jewish people are considered one entity. Each individual member of the Jewish people is a component of that entity. Each Jew complements the other to achieve *shleimus* (wholeness/completeness). The Jew works in tandem with his fellows to fulfill mitzvos that pertain to him. Since the Jewish people are all spiritually connected to one another, because their *nishamos* (souls) are intertwined to create one entity, it is considered that the entire Torah is fulfilled by the Jewish people. This is the basis for the principle of communal responsibility that each Jew is responsible for his fellow. When one fulfills his personal mitzvah, he does not only affect himself positively but also his fellow. Conversely, when one sins, he not only causes self-diminishment but he also diminishes the entire Jewish people.

The Yalkut explains that this is analogous to two people in a boat. One of the passengers starts to bore a hole under his seat through the hull of the boat. His fellow passenger attempts to stop him by saying, "Stop! What are you doing?" The individual responds, "What is it of your concern. The hole that I am boring is under my seat and not under yours!" His fellow replies "You do not understand. If you continue doing what you are doing the entire boat will sink!" When one Jew fails or transgresses, its negative effect is not limited to him, but rather it impacts the Jewish people as a whole because we are all bound together as one.

With this understanding we can appreciate the principle of **'you shall love your fellow as yourself'** as the most fundamental and all-encompassing concept in the Torah. Each Jew is a component of the same entity – which is the Jewish people. It is only through our joint participation do we fulfill the entire Torah.

The Maharal of Prague z'tl explains that *echad* (one) is numerically equivalent to thirteen. The Jewish people are comprised of thirteen tribes – twelve who were given a share in the Land of Israel and one (Levy) that was not. Thus, the Maharal explains that the thirteen tribes of the Jewish people reflect the Unity of Hashem, which is *echad*. The Maharal explains further that even within the context of the thirteen tribes that there is a more specific allusion to the word "*echad*."

The most spiritual of the thirteen tribes was the tribe of Levy because they were chosen to be the officiants of G'd. Therefore, in order to indicate his uniqueness we classify Levy as *aleph* (*one*). Of the four wives of Yaakov, two of them were classified as Matriarchs (Rachel and Leah)

and the other two were concubines (Bilhah and Zilpah). The Matriarchs, who were of special spiritual status, bore for Yaakov eight sons - Leah mothered six and Rachel two. The number **eight** corresponds to the Hebrew letter *ches*. The concubines (which were of lesser spiritual status) bore for him **four** sons, which corresponds to the Hebrew letter *daled*. Thus, the various levels of spirituality contained within the tribes of Israel are identified as Levy (*aleph*), the eight sons of the Matriarchs as *ches*, and the four sons of the concubines as *daled*. When combined together they spell - *echad* (one). Thus, not only does the number of tribes reflect the unity of Hashem, but also, the innate spiritual infrastructure of the thirteen reflects *echad* (*aleph ches daled*).

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin explains that the verse in Proverbs, “A G’d-fearing woman – she should be praised” is referring to the generation of Reb Yehudah Bar Elae. In his generation, the level of poverty was such that six Jews covered themselves with one tallis (garment) at one time. Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz z’tl (Mirer Rosh HaYeshivah) asks, “How is it possible for six individuals to cover themselves with one tallis?” He answers, “Usually when one shares a tallis with another, each individual pulls the tallis towards himself to be covered. If this would be the case, six people would not be able to cover themselves with the same garment. However, if each individual, because of his love for his fellow Jew, pulls the tallis towards his fellow, then six individuals are able to cover themselves with one tallis.” This was the generations of Reb Yehudah Bar Elae.

The Torah tells us that one must inform his fellow (admonish if necessary) if he sees him transgressing. However, this admonishment must be done in a way that it will not cause embarrassment to the individual who is being informed of the wrong that he had done. If one had violated the Torah, then why should he not be rebuked even to the point of embarrassment? Because of the principle of ‘you must love your fellow Jew as yourself,’ the transgressor should not be treated any differently than the one giving the rebuke. Just as the one who is rebuking would not wish to be embarrassed, so too must he be sensitive to his fellow.

The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah presents the concept of “Shomaiah K’oneh.” This refers to a person who has in mind to fulfill his obligation when listening to another person fulfilling a mitzvah (when the listener is also kept in mind to be covered). For example, the listener has fully satisfied his obligation through listening to the recitation of Kiddush and to the blowing of the shofar. Ran explains that this concept is rooted in the principle that each Jew is responsible for his fellow – to guarantee that he has fulfilled his obligation.

Normative Halacha (Jewish Law) rules that if one has the opportunity to fulfill his obligation as an individual or to be covered by others through the principle of “*Shomaiah K’oneh*,” it is preferable to do the latter. This is based on a verse in Proverbs, “Through a multitude of people, there is greater glory to the King (Hashem).” Usually one would understand this to mean that when a mitzvah is performed in a larger setting, it is a greater sanctification of Hashem’s Name. However, according to what we have explained, we are able to understand it in another context. Despite the larger numbers, one fulfills his obligation because all Jews are considered one entity. They reflect the unity of G’d.