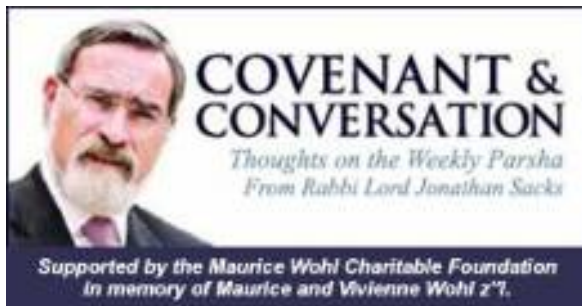


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On Leadership: Followership

There is a fascinating sequence of commands in the great "holiness code" with which our parsha begins, that sheds light on the nature not just of leadership in Judaism but also of followership. Here is the command in context:

Do not hate your brother in your heart. *Reprove [or reason with] your neighbour frankly so you will not bear sin because of him.* Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:17-18)

There are two completely different ways of understanding the italicized words. Maimonides brings them both as legally binding.¹ Nahmanides includes them both in his commentary to the Torah.²

The first is to read the command in terms of interpersonal relations. Someone, you believe, has done you harm. In such a case, says the Torah, do not remain in a state of silent resentment. Do not give way to hate, do not bear a grudge, and do not take revenge. Instead, reprove him, reason with him, tell him what you believe he has done and how you feel it has harmed you. He may apologise and seek to make amends. Even if he does not, at least you have made your feelings known to him. That in itself is cathartic. It will help you to avoid nursing a grievance.

The second interpretation, though, sees the command in impersonal terms. It has nothing to do with you being harmed. It refers to someone you see acting wrongly, committing a sin or a crime. You may not be the victim. You may be just an observer. The command tells us not to be content with passing a negative judgment on his behaviour (i.e. with "hating him in your heart"). You must get involved. You should remonstrate with him, pointing out in as gentle and constructive a way as you can, that what he is doing is against the law, civil or moral. If you stay silent and do nothing, you will become complicit in his guilt (i.e. "bear sin because of him") because you saw him do wrong and you did nothing to protest.

This second interpretation is possible only because of Judaism's fundamental principle that *kol Yisrael arevin zeh ba-zeh*, "All Jews are sureties [i.e. responsible] for one another." However, the Talmud makes a fascinating observation about the scope of the command:

One of the rabbis said to Raba: [The Torah says] *hokheach tokhiach*, meaning "you shall reprove your neighbour repeatedly" [because the

verb is doubled, implying more than once]. Might this mean *hokheach*, reprove him once, and *tokhiach*, a second time? No, he replied, the word *hokheach* means, even a hundred times. Why then does it add the word *tokhiach*? Had there been only a single verb I would have known that the law applies to a master reproving his disciple. How do we know that it applies even to a disciple reproving his master? From the phrase, *hokheach tokhiach*, implying, under all circumstances.³

This is significant because it establishes a principle of *critical followership*. So far in these essays we have been looking at the role of the leader in Judaism. But what about that of the follower? On the face of it the duty of the follower is to follow, and that of the disciple to learn. After all, Judaism commands almost unlimited respect for teachers. "Let reverence for your teacher be as great as your reverence for heaven," said the sages. Despite this the Talmud understands the Torah to be commanding us to remonstrate even with our teacher or leader should we see him or her doing something wrong.

Supposing a leader commands you to do something you know to be forbidden in Jewish law. Should you obey? The answer is a categorical No. The Talmud puts this in the form of a rhetorical question: "Faced with a choice between obeying the master [God] or the disciple [a human leader], whom should you obey?"⁴ The answer is obvious. Obey God. Here in Jewish law is the logic of civil disobedience, the idea that we have a duty to disobey an immoral order.

Then there is the great Jewish idea of active

questioning and "argument for the sake of heaven." Parents are obliged, and teachers encouraged, to train students to ask questions. Traditional Jewish learning is designed to make teacher and disciple alike aware of the fact that more than one view is possible on any question of Jewish law and multiple interpretations (the traditional number is seventy) of any biblical verse. Judaism is unique in that virtually all of its canonical texts - Midrash, Mishnah and Gemara - are anthologies of arguments (Rabbi X said this, Rabbi Y said that) or are surrounded by multiple commentaries each with its own perspective.

The very act of learning in rabbinic Judaism is conceived as active debate, a kind of gladiatorial contest of the mind: "Even a teacher and disciple, even a father and son, when they sit to study Torah together become enemies to one another. But they do not move from there until they have become beloved to one another."⁵ Hence the Talmudic saying, "Much wisdom I have learned from my teacher, more from my colleagues but most from my students."⁶ Therefore despite the reverence we owe our teachers, we owe them also our best efforts at questioning and challenging their ideas. This is essential to the rabbinical ideal of learning as a collaborative pursuit of truth.

The idea of critical followership gave rise in Judaism to the world's first social critics, the prophets, mandated by God to speak truth to power and to summon even kings to the bar of justice and right conduct. That is what Samuel did to Saul, Elijah to Ahab and Isaiah to Hezekiah. None did so more effectively than the prophet Nathan when, with immense skill, he got King David to appreciate the enormity of his

sin in sleeping with another man's wife. David immediately recognised his wrong and said *chatati*, "I have sinned."⁷

Exceptional though the prophets of Israel were, even their achievement takes second place to one of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of religion, namely that God himself chooses as His most beloved disciples the very people who are willing to challenge heaven itself. Abraham says, "Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?" Moses says, "Why have you done evil to this people?" Jeremiah and Habakkuk challenge God on the apparent injustices of history. Job, who argues with God, is eventually vindicated by God, while his comforters, who defended God, are deemed by God to have been in the wrong. In short, God Himself chooses active, critical followers rather than those who silently obey.

Hence the unusual conclusion that *in Judaism followership is as active and demanding as leadership*. We can put this more strongly: leaders and followers do not sit on opposite sides of the table. They are on the same side, the side of justice and compassion and the common good. No one is above criticism, and no one too junior to administer it, if done with due grace and humility. A disciple may criticise his teacher; a child may challenge a parent; a prophet may challenge a king; and all of us, simply by bearing the name Israel, are summoned to wrestle with God and our fellow humans in the name of the right and the good.

Uncritical followership and habits of silent obedience give rise to the corruptions of power, or sometimes simply to avoidable catastrophes. For example, a series of fatal accidents occurred between 1970 and 1999 to planes belonging to

Korean Air. One in particular, Korean Air Flight 8509 in December 1999, led to a review that suggested that Korean culture, with its tendency toward autocratic leadership and deferential followership, may have been responsible for the first officer not warning the pilot that he was off-course.

John F. Kennedy assembled one of the most talented group of advisors ever to serve an American President, yet in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 committed one of the most foolish mistakes. Subsequently, one of the members of the group, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., attributed the error to the fact that the atmosphere within the group was so convivial that no one wanted to disturb it by pointing out the folly of the proposal.⁸

Groupthink and conformism are perennial dangers within any closely-knit group, as a series of famous experiments by Solomon Asch, Stanley Milgram, Philip Zimbardo and others have shown. Which is why, in Cass Sunstein's phrase, "societies need dissent." My favourite example is one given by James Surowiecki in *The Wisdom of Crowds*. He tells the story of how an American naturalist, William Beebe, came across a strange sight in the Guyana jungle. A group of army ants was moving in a huge circle. The ants went round and round in the same circle for two days until most of them dropped dead. The reason is that when a group of army ants is separated from their colony, they obey a simple rule: follow the ant in front of you.⁹ The trouble is that if the ant in front of you is lost, so will you be.

Surowiecki's argument is that we need dissenting voices, people who challenge the conventional wisdom, resist the fashionable

consensus and disturb the intellectual peace. "Follow the person in front of you" is as dangerous to humans as it is to army ants. To stand apart and be willing to question where the leader is going is the task of the critical follower. Great leadership happens when there is strong and independently minded followership. Hence, when it comes to constructive criticism, a disciple may challenge a teacher and a prophet reprimand a king.

1. 1. Maimonides, *Hilkhot Deot* 6:6-7.
2. 2. Nahmanides, *Commentary to Leviticus* 19:17.
3. 3. Baba Metzia 31a.
4. 4. Kiddushin 42b.
5. 5. Kiddushin 30b.
6. 6. Ta'anit 7a.
7. 7. 2 Samuel 12:13.
8. 8. See Cass Sunstein, *Why Societies Need Dissent*, Harvard University Press, 2003, 2-3.
9. 9. James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, Little, Brown, 2004, 40-41.



Who Comes First?

Vayikra, 19:18: You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your neighbor as yourself – I am God.

Rashi, 19:18: sv. You shall love your neighbor as yourself: “Rebbe Akiva says, this is a fundamental principle of the Torah.”

The Torah famously instructs us to relate to our fellow man in the same way that we relate to ourselves. Rashi quotes Rebbe Akiva who explains that this is a fundamental principle of the Torah, which the commentaries explain to mean that numerous other commandments are built on the foundation of the commandment of ‘love your neighbor’. The Chatam Sofer notes a contradiction between Rebbe Akiva’s words here and another principle that he expounds in another place.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia discusses a situation where two people find themselves in the desert and only one of them has a bottle of water. There is enough water available to enable one of them to survive until they reach civilization. What should the person with the bottle do? Ben Beteira argues that he cannot leave his fellow to die alone, rather they must share the bottle.¹ Rebbe Akiva argues, and derives from the Torah a concept known as ‘*chayecha kodmim*’ (your life comes first) – that a person has the right to put his life before the life of his fellow. Accordingly, Rebbe Akiva rules that the person with the bottle may keep it.²

The Chatam Sofer writes that these two sayings of Rebbe Akiva seem to contradict themselves. His elucidation of the commandment of ‘love your neighbor’ seems to imply that one must treat his fellow man in the same way as himself, whereas his principle of ‘*chayecha kodmim*’ suggests that a person can put himself before his friend.³

He offers a fascinating answer to this question by differentiating between the physical and spiritual realm: The case in Bava Metzia is in the physical realm – there Rebbe Akiva holds

that one can put his own physical needs before those of his friend. However, in Kedoshim, Rebbe Akiva is referring to the spiritual realm; with regards to spirituality he argues that one must treat his fellow exactly the same as himself. To buttress his point, he says that is why Rebbe Akiva says that this a fundamental principle **in the Torah**. Why couldn't Rebbe Akiva simply say that this is a fundamental principle and stop there? The fact that he added the words, "in the Torah" alludes to the fact that in the realm of Torah, that is, the spiritual sphere, one must take the words of 'love your neighbor' literally and treat his friend the same as himself.⁴

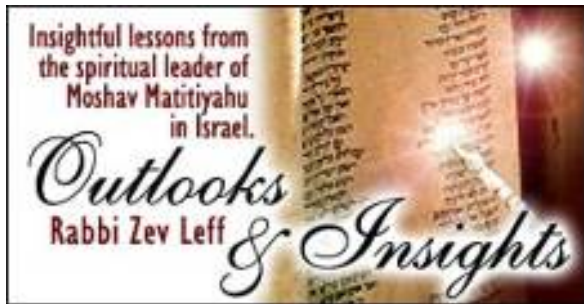
One implication of his explanation, he argues, is that a person should be willing to stop his own learning in order to teach someone else.⁵ This seems difficult to understand because he seems to be telling us to put our fellow **before** us by teaching them; this goes further than treating them **equally**. He explains, however, that when a person teaches someone else, they both benefit – the student for being taught, and also the teacher benefits from his teaching as well.

A further question on the Chatam Sofer's explanation is why should there be a difference between the physical and spiritual realms with regard to how one treats his fellow? Why, in the spiritual realm, must he treat his fellow like himself, whereas, in the physical realm, he can put himself first? It seems that the answer is based on the metaphysical concept that the Jewish nation is one spiritual entity. The commentaries compare it to one spiritual body where each Jew represents a different part of that body. This gives rise to the concept of 'kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh' - that each Jew is

responsible for each other. This goes so far as to mean that when one Jew sins, then it is considered as if other Jews also sinned.⁶ In contrast, on a physical level each person is separate simply because each person's body is separate from every one else. Accordingly, whilst there is an obligation to care for one's fellow Jew's physical needs, it does not reach the extent where one must treat his fellow exactly as himself.

The explanation of the Chatam Sofer and its halachic implications are subject to disagreement.⁷ Yet its philosophical ramifications are relevant to all of us. They remind us that the spiritual well-being of our fellow Jew is something that should be at the forefront of our concerns – not simply because we should care about our fellow Jew, but because their failings are our failings and their achievements are our achievements.

1. Bava Metsia, 62a. See Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah, 1st Chelek, Simun 145 who explains the reasoning of Ben Beteira.
2. Many Authorities hold that one is obligated to put himself first and is not allowed to give the bottle to his friend in this case. See MinchastAsher, Parshas Behar, pp.396-397 for discussion of this question.
3. See Ramban, Kedoshim, 19:18 who addresses a similar issue.
4. Torat Moshe, Parshat Kedoshim. Also see Sheilot and Teshuvot Chatam Sofer, Choshen Mishpat, Simun 164 where he applies this principle to halacha.
5. It may well be that he is referring to certain people, such as people on a high level of learning. Moreover, see Igrot Moshe, Even HaEzer, 4th Chelek, Simun 26 who argues with the Chatam Sofer on the halachic implications of his understanding. One should ask a Rabbi for specific guidance in this area.
6. To the extent that they could have done something to prevent the sin taking place.
7. See Igros Moshe, Even HaEzer, 4th Chelek, Simun 26 who argues with the Chasam Sofer on the halachic implications of his understanding. One should ask a Rav for specific guidance in this area, for example with regards to questions of how much time one should devote to teaching others, or when a person feels that he wants to end a chavrusa.



The Individual and the Group

The Talmud (Sotah 14a) instructs us in the Mitzvah of imitating God in all His ways. Just as God clothes the naked, visits the sick, comforts mourners and buries the dead, so should you emulate His example. Maimonides (Mourning 14:1) mentions all the above Mitzvot, but gives another source: the Torah commandment to *"love your friend as yourself."*

Why the twofold source for the Mitzvah of performing acts of kindness?

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 24:7) relates:

Rabbi Akiva said, *"Love your neighbor as yourself* - this is a great rule in Torah." Ben Azzai said, "This is the book of the generations of man ... in the image of God was man fashioned" is a greater rule, for one should not say, 'Since I was shamed, so, too, should my friend be shamed with me. Since I was cursed, so, too, let my friend be cursed with me.' "

Rabbi Akiva, as Hillel before him, saw in the commandment *"Love your friend as yourself"* the foundation of the entire Torah. The purpose of the entire Torah, Maimonides says (Chanukah 4:14), is to bring peace and harmony to the world, and in order to achieve this, one must conduct himself so that those things which are hateful and repulsive to him are not done to

his friend.

Ben Azzai, however, feared rooting a person's conduct toward others in his own subjective feelings and making what is hateful to him the standard for his conduct toward others. There is always a danger that a person might become hardened or insensitive to being shamed or cursed after repeated instances, and thus less sensitive to the need not to humiliate or curse others. Therefore, said Ben Azzai, "in the image of God was man fashioned," is a more all-encompassing source for our duties to our fellow men.

RESPECT AND HONOR

Although both verses seem to apply exclusively to relationships between man and his fellow, Rashi (Talmud - Shabbos 31a) points out that God is also referred to as "your friend" and one must also relate to Him in peace and harmony. In addition, the relationship between one's soul and body must be harmonious. *"Love your friend as yourself"* thus applies equally to all relationships: between man and God, between man and man, and between man and himself. It thus encompasses the entire Torah.

(Rabbi Akiva agreed with Ben Azzai that an appreciation of the intrinsic worth of the individual is crucial, but felt it was implied in the words "as yourself." A person must first have a proper understanding of his own intrinsic self-worth in order to fulfill the Mitzvah to relate to his friend in a similar fashion.)

There are two reasons for the respect the Torah requires us to show others. One is communal; the other focuses on the individual. The first arises out of the desire to bring peace and harmony to the world; the second because each

human being intrinsically deserves the respect and honor befitting one created in the Divine Image. On the one hand, the Torah is concerned with the individual and the development of the Divine Image within him; on the other hand the Torah is concerned with the community, with the social interactions between people.

At times, these two concerns are harmonious: what is good for the individual is good for the community and vice versa. But there are times when these concerns are in conflict, and the individual's needs conflict with those of the community. Sometimes the community must yield to the individual, and sometimes the individual must sacrifice for the community. This balance between individual and community is crucial to a proper observance of the Torah and a development toward perfection.

LEFT HAND, RIGHT HAND

In Parshat Kedoshim, there are a series of Mitzvot which highlight the importance of the individual, while at the same time not losing sight of the importance of the individual as a part of the community. On the one hand, the community does not become the supreme value, robbing the individual of his intrinsic importance. At the same time, the individual must recognize that he does not exist in a vacuum, that he is a member of society whose actions profoundly affect others.

The Torah exhorts us, "*Do not spread gossip.*" Respect the privacy of the individual. And likewise, "*Do not stand by with respect to your friend's blood*" - be willing to exert efforts to save the life of a fellow Jew, for every Jew is an entire world.

At the same time, do not lose sight of the equal

importance for unity and interaction. Thus, "*Do not despise your brother and distance yourself from him by harboring negative feelings in your heart,*" thereby causing division in the common soul that binds all Jews. Likewise, the Torah continues with a command to recognize our responsibility to others by reproofing them when necessary. Do not say: **I'll mind my own business; live and let live.** Your fellow Jew is your business.

The command, "*Do not take revenge*" also forces us to recognize the communal nature of the Jewish people. The Jerusalem Talmud compares taking revenge on a fellow Jew to one who accidentally strikes his left hand while hammering - and then takes the hammer into his bruised left hand and strikes his right hand!

EQUAL IMPORTANCE

Now we can understand the necessity for two sources in the Torah for deeds of kindness. On the one hand, one must do kindness out of recognition of the intrinsic value of his fellow Jew, who is a reflection of the Divine Image. In addition, one must also consider the ramifications of his actions on society, and do kindness to promote peace and harmony on a communal level.

Both of these aspects are fundamental and crucial to the proper service of Torah. The students of Rabbi Akiva - despite learning from their teacher that loving one another as themselves is the basis of the entire Torah - failed to adequately honor the Divine Image in each other or acknowledge one another as partners in developing society.

Our mourning over their deaths during this period reinforces our recognition of respect for

our fellow man as the basis of our relationship with God. We must appreciate our own individual worth as human beings created in God's image, as well as the intrinsic worth of all our fellow Jews. At the same time, we must also recognize the equal importance of the group and our need to unite peacefully and harmoniously into a cohesive community.



The Holy Separation

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

In this week's parsha (Leviticus 18:3), God charges the Jewish people not to behave like the Egyptians, from whose culture we came, or the Canaanites, who inhabit the Land of Israel. What is the nature of this command? If the point is to steer us away from immoral behavior, the Torah explicitly tells us a few verses later (Leviticus 18:6-30). What does it mean, then, that we are instructed not to act like the Egyptian or Canaanite nations?

Moreover, at the beginning of Parshat Kedoshim, the Torah states, "Be holy" (Leviticus 19:2). Rashi interprets this statement to mean that we must separate ourselves from immorality.

The Tiferet Shmuel (vol. 1) takes issue with Rashi's comment, and wonders: can someone who disengages from immorality really be

called "holy"? Imagine a eulogizer at a funeral praising the deceased by saying, "This man was truly holy. Not once did he engage in adultery, incest, or bestiality!" Committing these sins is wickedness; refraining from them seems to be merely maintaining the status quo. How can Rashi understand the statement "Be holy" as a command to stay away from obvious misdeeds?

The Slonimer Rebbe begins to address our question by explaining what it means to act like an Egyptian. In his view, the Torah is not telling us to avoid performing *prohibited* actions; rather, it is teaching us how to engage in *permitted* physical activities. Even in the realm of permissible behavior, we must not overindulge or seek out passion for passion's sake, as the Egyptians did. Instead, we must act like Jews, striving to perform every action in a healthy, balanced way, with the ultimate goal of fulfilling God's will.

Nachmanides expresses a similar idea, as he mentions that our Sages (in Torat Kohanim) explain the statement "Be holy" as "Be separate." The Torah permits pleasurable physical activities - eating kosher meat, drinking kosher wine, intimacy between husband and wife - yet someone who is driven by lustful passions may overindulge in these activities while thinking that he is still within the bounds of Torah law. Such a person is called a "glutton" (see Proverbs 23:20). Thus, after Parshat Acharei Mot lists all the specific prohibitions regarding immorality, Parshat Kedoshim teaches us generally, "Be holy." We must separate ourselves from overindulging in permissible activities, curbing our appetites in order to maintain dignity and holiness.

MAKE A FENCE

Based on this idea, the Tiferet Shmuel answers our question of how Rashi can imply that we are called "holy" merely by staying away from immorality. The Talmud states, "Sanctify yourself with that which is permitted to you" (Yevamot 20a). Another passage (Avodah Zara 17a) elaborates on this idea, in which a *Nazir* (one who has voluntarily decided to abstain from wine) is advised not to take a shortcut through a vineyard, but rather to walk all the way around it. Strictly speaking, a Nazir may pass through a vineyard - he is only prohibited from partaking of the grapes. But since walking through a vineyard would put him in such close proximity to the prohibition, a "fence" is necessary to protect him from possible temptation. (See Avot 1:1, which states, "Make a fence for the Torah.")

If we accustom ourselves to avoid overindulgence in that which is permissible, we surely will not engage in prohibited behavior.

According to the Tiferet Shmuel, this is what Rashi means when he interprets "Be holy" as "Be separate from immorality." The words "be separate" indicate that we should curb our appetites even in permitted areas. Then, after restating our Sages' words, Rashi explains the reasoning behind them: "from immorality." The Tiferet Shmuel understands the word "from" to mean "because of." Due to the prohibitions against immoral behavior, we must make a fence around them to ensure that we stay far away from any wrongdoing.

Based on this view, there is no contradiction between Rashi and Nachmanides; both are emphasizing the importance of maintaining holiness even in permitted activities.

Furthermore, we can now understand why Rashi's language seemed to differ from that of our Sages. In fact, he uses the same expression ("be separate"), but then adds a reason afterwards.

May we be blessed to escape from the "Egypt" within us, little by little each day, by engaging in permitted behavior in a healthy, balanced way.



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