

Torah Table Talk
A Stumbling Block to Holiness
Parshat Kedoshim
Leviticus 19:1 – 20:25

Speaking about Parshat Kedoshim, the sages commented that this Parshah is one of the most important because “the most essential principles of the Torah are attached to it.” Indeed, the Ten Commandments are all found in this Parshah as well as some of the best known and most powerful words of Torah: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” “Don’t stand idly by the life of your brother,” and “Do not favor the poor nor show deference to the rich.” All of these commandments are placed in the context of holiness: “You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy.” Any verse in Parshat Kedoshim could be the subject of an entire discussion. We will therefore focus on a verse and consider its far reaching implications.

1. What does holiness, Kedoshim, mean? Where do we experience holiness in our lives? In what ways is God holy and in what ways can human beings be holy.
2. Is the statement “You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy,” a statement, a commandment or a promise?
3. Why are we told that the call to be holy was given to the *whole* community of Israel and not to Moses or the priests (like many of the commandments in Leviticus)?

Leviticus 19:14

You shall not insult the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

1. Is there a difference between insulting the deaf and placing a stumbling block before the blind? Why does the Torah mention both of these acts?
2. Why does the verse also remind us “to fear your Lord?” In the context of these actions what does this add to our understanding of the verse?
3. Do you think the verse is speaking only about the deaf and the blind, or is commenting on a broader category of people? If so, who would you include in this category?

Sifra

...before the blind in a matter. Should he ask you: “Is the daughter of so and so qualified to marry a Kohen,” do not answer him: Yes, she is qualified when she is really unfit. If he comes to consult to you, do not give him wrong advice. Do not say to him go out early when robbers would waylay hi; go out at noon when he should get sunstroke. Do not say to him: Sell your field and buy yourself and ass and then by a trick take it from him.

1. How does the Sifra understand the term, “blind?” Why doesn’t the comment simply stick to the little understanding of the verse above?
2. How does the assailant mislead the victim in each of these situations?

3. Why does the Sifra choose to illustrate its understanding of this verse with three examples? What do they have in common and how are they different from one another?

Pesachim 22b

Rabbi Nathan said: Whence do we learn that a man should not serve a Nazirite (who is forbidden to drink alcohol) wine or a non-Jew living flesh (One of the prohibitions which a non-Jew must also observe)? From the verse: “You shall not put a stumbling block before the blind.”

Moed Katan 17a

“You shall not put a stumbling block before the blind.” The text refers to one who hits his grown up son. (*But since he is grown up, he might resent it and deal his father a blow who will thus be prompting his son to commit a crime. - Rashi*)

Baba Metziah 75a

Rabbi Judah said, in the name of Rav: “Whoever has money and lends it without witnesses violates the prohibition, “You shall not put a stumbling block before the blind.”¹

1. How do these statements in the Talmud use the verse from Parshat Kedoshim to prove their point? How is the victim “blind” in each case?
2. Come up with your own contemporary examples of “placing a stumbling block before the blind.” For instance, how does modern advertising sometimes play on our weakness to influence our judgment? What other areas of life can this principle be applied to.
3. In what way does observing this commandment allow us to achieve holiness

Glossary

Sifra: Is a fourth century Midrashic commentary on the book of Leviticus written in the land of Israel.

Pesachim, Moed Katan and Baba Metziah: These are all the names of various tractates in the Talmud

How to use Torah Table Talk

1. *Read the sheet out loud to one another. Discuss what it has to say.*
2. *Focus on the text in the box. It is taken from Biblical, post-biblical and modern Jewish sources. What does it mean? How does it make you feel?*
3. *Try to answer the questions following the text.*
4. *This is not a test and there are many correct answers and interpretations to each question. Share your ideas with one another. Be open and honest in sharing your ideas.*

***“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”***

Copyright 2004: Rabbi Mark B Greenspan

¹ Sources are all borrowed from Studies in Vayikra, by Nahama Leibovitz.