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Parsha

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Gematria on the Parshah: Ahavat Yisrael, the Key to the Geulah



By: Reb Moshe Herskovits

Parshat Kedoshim contains one of the most famous commands in the Torah: "Veahavta le-reacha kamocho," to love your fellow as yourself. Famously, Chazal teach that the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed because of sinat chinam (baseless hatred), and it will be rebuilt through ahavat chinam (baseless love). This raises a fundamental question: Why is Ahavat Yisrael the key to the Geulah?

It sounds simple to love another Jew, but in reality it can be a difficult mitzvah. Differences in opinion, and past pain can build walls between people. Chazal teach that the entire Geulah depends on those walls coming down. So how do we begin to break them?

Loving Hashem Means Loving His Children
The Baal Shem Tov teaches that Ahavat Hashem and Ahavat Yisrael are not two separate ideas but one. This idea is hinted at in gematria. The pasuk וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ אֲנִי ה' (You shall love your neighbor as yourself I am God) equals 907, the same as וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ (You shall love Hashem your God). To truly be close to Hashem means to love what He loves: the Jewish people.

There is no greater path to a parent's heart than when they know their children are deeply cared for by another. The Chida says through loving Hashem's children we earn Hashem's trust, and His presence dwells among us.

This is hinted to in gematria. אָהַבָה (love) equals 13. 13 x 2 equals 26, which is ה' (YKVK). When two Jews truly love each other, Hashem's presence dwells among them.

The Key to the Palace

If loving others is the way to love Hashem, then it must change the way we pray. The Baal Shem Tov gives a mashal. There is a long line of people waiting to enter the palace to present their requests before the king. One person with an urgent personal matter tries to go ahead but is told to wait.

Another person comes and says, "I must speak to the king! It is an emergency concerning his children!" He is immediately brought inside the palace.

The Tzaddik is like this second person. Since his focus is on Hashem's children, he accesses the King.

To merit the Divine Presence our prayers must be an expression of Ahavat Yisrael. We must pray for the needs of every Jew.

The Ohev Yisrael of Apt said that every single night he would take time to think about Jews all over the world. He would think about their struggles: parnassah, shidduchim, children, and pray for their personal redemption. This kind of tefillah is what opens the gates of the palace.

Becoming the Key to the Geulah

The Chida explains that one of the main reasons the Geulah has not yet come is because we are not focused on it.

He says a person must pursue the Geulah like someone searching for a cure for a life threatening illness.

A powerful illustration of this is found in a story about the Alter Rebbe. At a farbrengen someone needed a brachah for a life threatening illness. The Alter Rebbe said that if all the Jews present would say lechaim together and pray as one it could bring salvation.

He explained that when an individual comes to make a request from the King, he is judged on whether he is worthy. But when all the children come together on behalf of their brother, the King's mercy is awakened. So too when Am Yisrael comes together as one in our lives and in our tefillot, we become the key that opens the final gates of redemption.

Challenge

This week set aside 10 minutes to pray for the specific needs for Am Yisrael. Through this we draw the Shechinah upon us and draw the Geulah closer.

The Discipline to Close. The Courage to Open.

By: Reb Adam Klasner



There is a quiet contradiction many men carry.

On the outside, they are strong, productive, capable. They show up. They build. They provide.

But inside, something is off.

They feel pulled by impulses they do not fully control. Food, distraction, their phone, habits that numb rather than nourish. And at the same time, in the places that actually matter most, in relationships, in emotional connection, in presence, they feel shut down.

Distant. Guarded. Unavailable.

This week's Parsha speaks directly into that tension.

The Torah uses the word "ani" twice. Same word. Same meaning. But pronounced differently.

One is closed. One is open.

And that shift is not technical. It is deeply human.

When the Torah speaks about food, about what we take in, the "ani" is closed.

Because taking in requires discipline.

If a man cannot set boundaries with what he consumes, whether it is food, content, stimulation, or noise, he loses himself. He becomes reactive. Pulled. Dependent. You see it in small moments.

You open the fridge, not because your body needs food, but because something inside you feels empty.

You pick up your phone, not because there is something important, but because silence feels uncomfortable.

You eat, scroll, consume, not out of choice, but out of escape.

That is not freedom.

That is a lack of containment.

So the Torah says, here, you need contraction.

Close your mouth.
Filter what enters.
Choose what you allow into your system.

Not from repression. From self respect.

Because when a man respects himself, he does not hand over control of his inner world to whatever is available.

But then the Torah shifts.

When it speaks about relationships, about connection, about intimacy, the "ani" opens.

Because connection requires a completely different strength.

To be in a real relationship means you cannot hide behind control.

You cannot predict every moment. You cannot manage the other person. You cannot stay protected and still be fully present.

You have to open.

And this is where most men struggle.

Not because they do not want connection, but because opening feels dangerous.

If you were not fully seen as a child, if your emotions were not held, if vulnerability led to disappointment or pain, your system learned something very clear.

Do not open too much.

Stay in control. Stay guarded. Stay safe.

So now you grow up and build a life.

But when your wife, your partner, your child, or even a close friend comes toward you emotionally, something in you tightens.

You either shut down.
Or you react.
Or you escape.

And then you feel the distance.

The Torah is not asking you to be a different person.
It is asking you to become more precise.
To know where to close.
And where to open.

A man who is always open becomes weak and consumed.
A man who is always closed becomes isolated and disconnected.

Real growth is learning how to move between the two.

To sit in front of food and have the strength to say, this is enough.

To sit in front of another human being and have the courage to say, I am here.

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That presence is not natural for most of us.

It requires inner work.

Because the moment something triggers you, your system will want to protect itself.

It will tell you to shut down. To defend. To withdraw.

And in that moment, you have a choice.

You can follow the old pattern.
Or you can pause.

Feel what is happening inside your body.
Notice the tightening. The discomfort. The urge to escape.

And instead of running from it, stay with it.

Breathe into it.

Let yourself feel without collapsing.

That is where a new kind of strength is built.

Not the strength of control.
The strength of presence.

Over time, something begins to shift.

You stop needing food, distraction, or control to regulate yourself.

And you stop fearing connection.

You can hold yourself.

And from that place, you can finally hold someone else.

That is what the Torah means by kedusha.

Not being perfect.

But becoming a man who knows how to contain himself when taking in, and how to open himself when giving out.

The Moment After the Fall

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



Among the many Avodos of Yom Kippur described in Parshas Acharei Mos, none is more arresting than the Sei'ir LaAzazel - the goat sent to Azazel, bearing the sins of Klal Yisrael (Vayikra 16). It stands apart from every other Korban in the Torah. There is no fire, no Mizbayach, no Kohen receiving a portion. It is dispatched into the desert and cast off a cliff. What is the meaning of this strange and solitary Avodah?

The Avodas Pnim shares the following parable: A merchant is traveling with precious stones when he realizes that bandits are pursuing him relentlessly. At every turn they follow, and he sees no escape. In a moment of desperation, he throws a single pearl from his bosom. The bandits lunge upon it - and in that brief window of distraction - the merchant escapes with his life (Avodas Pnim 1:30).

This, explains the Avodas Pnim, is the inner logic of the Sei'ir LaAzazel. The goat is cast toward the forces of impurity - not as worship, which would constitute Avodah Zarah, but as a sanctioned diversion, commanded by Hashem Himself. The Yetzer Hara, consumed with its prize, loosens its grip for a moment. And in that moment, the person can reclaim his life and do Teshuva.

We no longer have the Beis HaMikdash, and the Avodah of the Sei'ir LaAzazel cannot be

performed. But the reality it points to has not disappeared.

There are moments in a person's life that mirror this parable exactly. After a stumble, the Yetzer Hara is, in a sense, satisfied - it has claimed its pearl. And in that moment of distraction, a window opens that did not exist before. The shame and regret that follow a fall are not obstacles to Teshuva - they are precisely what makes it possible. That raw, unguarded moment of awareness is the merchant's opening. The question is whether he runs and the danger is a moment's hesitation. Waiting for a calmer moment inevitably invites the return of the bandits - and the Yetzer Hara comes back emboldened, not depleted.

The Sei'ir LaAzazel teaches us that Teshuva is designed for the moment after the fall - built into the very architecture of Yom Kippur itself. Hashem does not wait for us to be ready. He creates the opening. The only question is whether we are willing to run through it.

Upgrade Your Spiritual Wardrobe!

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks



They tell the story of this lady who only attends Shul on Yom Kippur. Her Rabbi asks her why he doesn't see her more often in Shul. She responds, "To tell you the truth, Rabbi, I find the services to be too monotonous!"

"Monotonous?" The Rabbi asks.

"Yes, Rabbi," the lady responds, "it's the exact same thing every single time I attend... Kol Nidre, Kol Nidre, Kol Nidre!"

The joke lands because we recognize ourselves in the lady. We have all, at some point, confused comfortable habits for actual growth and showing up for stepping up.

In the Parsha of Acharei Mos, we learn that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, wearing a brand-new set of special white garments. Think about what this means. The regular priestly garments were worn continuously until they were frayed before they were replaced. But the sacred Yom Kippur garments, the ones worn in the most intimate encounter with the Divine that any human being has ever experienced, could never be reused. Every year demanded a completely fresh set of clothing.

Why? Because an encounter with the infinite cannot happen in yesterday's clothes. Stagnation and complacency directly sabotage our divine mission. We cannot coast on yesterday's breakthroughs. The birds know this. They fly to warmth before the freeze can claim them. Their wings stay strong because they use them to change their circumstances. We are no different.

The spiritual routine that inspired you two years ago may not be enough anymore. You may feel restless. But know this, the restlessness that you are experiencing is not a punishment. It is a prompt. It lets you know that you may be wearing an expired spiritual uniform.

So take stock right now. Where have you been coasting? Where have you been showing up in the same worn garments, expecting a different, deeper experience? Identify one area of your life where you feel you are languishing. It could be in your learning, your relationships, your connection to G-d. Then commit to something new. A fresh perspective, a new practice, or just a deeper level of honesty with yourself.

The very fact that you feel the pull, that you sense there is more, is proof that G-d has already

begun stitching your new garments. All you have to do is put them on!

Not What I Want — What Is Right

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



The parsha opens with a line that quietly reshapes how we think about closeness to Hashem:

"אל יבא בכל עת אל הקדש" (Vayikra 16:2 — He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary).

Even the Kohen Gadol, entering the holiest place in the world, cannot come whenever he feels ready. Because avodat Hashem is not built on access—it is built on alignment.

Not: What do I want?
But: What is right?

The Torah continues, "בואת יבא אהרן אל הקדש" (Vayikra 16:3 — With this shall Aharon enter the Sanctuary). There is a way, a structure, a moment. Even the desire to come close—something inherently holy—is not enough on its own. It has to be guided and shaped by what is true in that moment.

The Zohar expresses this with a deeper language: "ומנין דאינון תרעין פתיחין, ומנין דאינון תרעין סתימין" (Zohar, Acharei Mot — There are times when the gates are open, and times when they are closed). Reality itself has structure. There are moments when the door is open—and moments when it is not.

Humility means accepting that distinction. It means recognizing that not every moment is mine to take, even if my intentions are pure.

Chazal sharpen this idea further: "ואל תאמר: 'ואל תפנה' — לךשאפנה אשנה — שמה לא תפנה" (Pirkei Avot 2:4 — Do not say, 'When I have time I will learn,' for perhaps you will never have time). Some moments demand action. Others demand waiting. The challenge is knowing which is which.

The Zera Shimshon brings this into our inner world: "לא כל העולה על רוחו של אדם לעשות דבר קדוש" — "לא ראי לעשות מיד" (Zera Shimshon — Not every holy impulse that enters a person's mind is meant to be acted upon immediately). A person can feel inspired, uplifted, even spiritually driven—and still be misaligned. Because inspiration is not the same as truth.

The Ohr HaChaim completes the picture by explaining that "הקדש צריכה הכנה וסדר" (Ohr HaChaim, Vayikra 16:3 — Entering holiness requires preparation and order). Preparation means stepping outside of yourself. Not asking, What do I feel like doing? but rather, What does this moment actually require of me?

There are two subtle tests in life: doing what is right when you don't feel like it—and even harder, not doing something, even something you think is holy, when it isn't right. Because sometimes the greatest mistake is not doing something wrong, but doing something right for the wrong reason, at the wrong time.

It's not about what I want.
It's about what is right.

And the more a person lives with that clarity, the more their life stops revolving around themselves—and begins to align with something higher.

