KORACH: The First Influencers

On ben Pelet is a mysterious figure in the Torah. We know almost nothing about him. This week's parashah mentions him in the context of Korach's rebellion: On is a leader of the tribe of Reuben who joins Korach to challenge Moshe's political role. After they make their case against Moshe, the anti-Moshe coalition gets ready for the next day: in the morning it will be decided –by divine providence– who the true leader of Israel is. The following day, the Divine Presence reveals itself and confirms Moshe's appointment. Korach, his henchmen, and his followers were punished and lost their lives. The Torah names those who died in the uprising, but On ben Pelet is not listed among the dead. Why? What happened to On?

The Influence of a Wife

The Sages explain that behind Korach's rebellion stood his wife. It was she who, out of ambition, jealousy, and envy, pushed him to rise up against Moshe. She didn't merely encourage his rebellious thoughts: she egged him on, day after day. She filled his head with words that fed his resentment and his pride, making him feel that Moshe and Aharon had taken from him what he deserved. According to the Midrashim, this influencer kept telling him how unfair it was that his cousin held all the power, while he –every bit as important, and of distinguished lineage– held no leadership at all. She awakened in him a craving for greatness, until Korach could no longer see reality clearly. The ambition she cultivated in him was, in the end, what led to his ruin.

By contrast, the Midrash tells us that On ben Pelet was saved by his wife. After Korach and his followers confronted Moshe, On came home and told his wife that the question of leadership would be settled the next day, and that he would try to become one of the people's leaders. But his wife was not impressed by the prospect of political prestige. She acted with

intelligence and common sense: when her husband laid out his plans, she discouraged him from siding against Moshe. And she proceeded not only with common sense, but with a great deal of strategy. First, she convinced him that no matter who replaced Moshe, he would still end up in the background. His role wouldn't change: Korach was only using him.

The Strategy of On's Wife

Though On agreed with his wife, he told her he still had to show up, because he had already committed to Korach and his friends. Seeing that On was set on going through with his plan, she said nothing –but she decided to take the matter into her own hands.

What did On's wife do? She most likely kept him awake as long as possible that night. And before he went to sleep, she gave him a very strong wine to drink, which left him sleeping far longer than usual. In the morning, when his friends came to fetch him and wanted to enter the house to wake him, On's wife deliberately let her hair down –something a married Jewish woman did only in front of her husband– and, out of modesty, the men stayed waiting outside. So they asked her to wake him instead.

I imagine they must have shouted to her from outside the tent that it was late, that the revolt was about to begin. And she must have answered: "Don't worry. You go on ahead –I'll wake my husband and he'll be right there with you." And so she kept her husband asleep a couple of hours more: exactly the time needed for the tragic revolt to run its course. With great intelligence and feminine influence, she saved his life!

Korach's wife fed her husband's ambition to rebel against Moshe and led him to his destruction; On's wife used all her intelligence, her charm, and her influence to save him. And she succeeded.

KORACH: Four Words That Could Save Your Life

UBNE KORACH LO METU

It isn't enough just to learn the meaning of this verse of the Torah (pasuq). I'd recommend you memorize it. Or print it out and keep it in your pocket, your purse, or your wallet. It's a very short pasuq, one that belongs to the parashah we'll read in a few weeks, Pinchas, but it refers to what happened in our parashah, Korach. The pasuq consists of just four simple words: "UBNE KORACH LO METU," which literally means "And the sons of Korach did not die." In other words, they survived.

What is this brief text pointing to?

Sons vs. Father

Driven by ambition, envy, and bad counsel, Korach decided to rebel against Moshe and Aharon to strip them of their political leadership. Korach wasn't alone: more than 250 people joined him in his rebellious venture. His end was horrific: he died swallowed by the earth. And everyone who stood with him met the same fate. Yet, as this pasuq tells us, the sons of Korach were the exception —and they survived! Why? The sons of Korach, who were already grown men, had joined the rebellion led by their father and taken part in the protests and demonstrations against Moshe. But "at the last moment," when the hour of the final confrontation arrived, they snapped out of it. They realized that what they were doing was an act of madness, and that if they didn't turn back right then and there, the damage would be irreparable! The sons of Korach survived because they repented just in time, in the final minute.

I think of the moral challenges all of us face every day.

Rage and Anger

Sometimes we're carried away by rage and we're about to raise a hand to hurt someone physically, or to wound them deeply with cruel words. These impulsive acts of violence –physical violence especially– can have irreversible consequences for the victim and for the perpetrator alike. In an impulsive act that lasts only a few seconds, a person can condemn himself to live with the consequences for the rest of his life.

Fatal Impulses

Other times we're carried away by our passions. We get involved with the wrong person, our common sense clouds over, and so, in one brief moment, we let instinct drag us along –ready to ruin "forever" our honor, to stain our good name and our children's, and to destroy our family.

Texting and Losing Everything

It happens that a person is about to send a message written in anger, pouring out all his frustration with no filter. We do it more to vent than to actually communicate something, and we don't stop to gauge how the person receiving it will react. There are famous cases of prominent figures who lost their jobs over a single inappropriate tweet that, once sent and captured by just one follower, they could never take back. In the age of WhatsApp and Snapchat, you can wreck another person's life –or your own– just by sending one inappropriate photo. Incredibly, we don't always grasp how serious and how irreversible our actions are. Why? I think it's because, unconsciously, we assume that grave things with far-reaching consequences must be hard to carry out… and clicking "send" seems so easy!

The Last Resort

The striking thing is that, in several famous cases of impulsive acts or inappropriate messages, the people who make the mistake realize what they've done just a few seconds later!

In every one of those cases, our name, our family, our reputation, and our life can be saved by remembering this pasuq: "AND THE SONS OF KORACH SURVIVED." The sons of Korach, who were on the verge of ruining their lives and losing everything, realized what they were about to do a brief moment before –they turned back, and they were saved.

I recommend memorizing these four little words. And if ever, □"□, someone is about to fall into the destructive trap of his own impulses, let him say this pasuq to himself and remember that the wisdom of turning back at the last minute saved the lives of the sons of Korach. And it can save yours.

□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□

And the sons of Korach survived!

Bamidbar 26:11

BEHALOTEKHA: More therapy or more responsibilities?

American Jewish journalist Abigail Shrier, in her 2024 book Bad Therapy, does not deny that therapy can help, or even save lives. Her warning is that in certain circles it has become automatic, used even when it is not needed. Her target is a culture that, in the name of catharsis, pushes children, and especially teenagers, to ruminate on their own distress again

and again. And chewing on it does not help. It locks them in a loop of anxiety that only drags them down further. Asking “how are you feeling” on repeat, validating every fear, tracking every emotion: all of it, Shrier says, manufactures the very problem it claims to cure.

For the kind of anxiety that comes from abundance and from having nothing meaningful to do, her prescription is not the couch. It is real life. And she gets specific. Give the teenager chores at home, jobs that actually matter and have to get done. Push him to get a job, part-time or summer, and earn something with his own effort. Let him move around and figure things out alone: run an errand, settle his or her own fights. Set clear rules at home and hold the line, instead of negotiating every point with your child like she is another adult. And on the other side, let go. Stop padding every fall. Stop treating every normal stumble of growing up like a wound that needs treatment.

Strong character is not built by picking at small problems until they grow. It is built through competence: the feeling that you can stand on your own, that you are useful, that you are worthy. The teenager carrying a real responsibility is too busy to spend his days ruminating over his feelings.

BEHAALOTEKHA: The anxiety of having it all

Clinical anxiety, and the other kind

There are two kinds of anxiety, and they should not be confused. One is clinical. It has a real cause: a concrete threat, the panic attack, the racing heart. That kind is

medical. It belongs to doctors, and nothing here is about it.

The other kind is cultural, even spiritual. It grows out of materialism and abundance. It is not the anxiety of the man with nothing to eat. It is the opposite. It is the anxiety of the man who has everything. That was roughly the situation of the children of Israel in the desert. God gave them everything they needed. No generation since has known that kind of material ease. The man or manna fell from the sky each morning. Nobody had to plant it, harvest it, store it, or worry about tomorrow's supply. It was a complete food: tasty, filling, and nutritious. And it solved the problem that had haunted humanity since Adam: Where will my next meal come from? In Egypt they had worked like animals to answer that one question. Now it was answered. And right then, in the middle of all that comfort, the crisis hit.

Anxiety and emptiness

The mechanics are simple. The human mind runs on a kind of energy built to solve problems: find bread, protect your family, and put a roof up. That mental energy does not switch off when the problems go away. It stays on. It looks for something to do. And when it finds no real goal to attach to, it curdles into anxiety. How?

The small stuff floats up. The Hebrew word for trivial, superficial stuff is "shtuyot": nonsense. It rushes in to fill the empty space at the center of the mind. The question is no longer "what will I eat." It is "Do I want the steak medium or medium well?" It is no longer "what will keep me warm." It is "which of my fifteen pairs of shoes goes with this dress."

The same Jews who spent centuries as slaves, working for a piece of Matzah, now complain about the manna and demand meat. And fish. And melon for dessert. In the desert!

The first to complain were the asafsuf: the ones with the least spiritual inclination, the ones who never embraced the

new national project, which was to learn the Torah they had just received and become God's people. Freedom plus abundance minus purpose left a void they were not built for. They had nowhere to channel the extra mental energy. Slavery had been easier. At least slavery came with a job.

The wrong diagnosis

What happened in the desert is one of our problems too. We are the best-supplied generation in history. We wiped out hunger across whole continents. We have heat, air conditioning, medicine, too much food, and entertainment without end. We are also the most anxious people who have ever lived. But the curve runs backward from what we expected. More abundance, more anxiety. Fewer real needs, more shtuyot becoming needs.

It is easy to misread this. Many treat this particular anxiety, not the clinical kind, which is real and needs care, like a broken part to be repaired. But read through this week's Parasha; it is not a psychological issue but a spiritual one. The fix is not chemical. It is a question of direction.

Testing or coaching?

The Torah frames the desert paradise as a nisayon: a test, or better, a training exercise. Take away the daily fight for survival, and one question is left standing. What will you do with your mind when you no longer need it to keep yourself alive?

The answer is not to go back to scarcity. Hardships do not make us better. They distract us. The answer is to give that mental energy a target worth the effort. Build a family. Raise children. Build a home with values. Study Torah. Get closer to God. Improve your Amida. Volunteer at a hospital, at Bikkur Holim, or at a home for the elderly. Any real work for someone else.

A mind that isn’t occupied gets preoccupied. And preoccupation is where this type of anxiety comes from. The surest way to stop chewing on your own small troubles is to go do something that really matters for someone else.

NASO: Sotah and the Art of Marital Fidelity

The trust between husband and wife is one of the foundations on which a family stands—and infidelity is one of the few things powerful enough to bring it down.

One of the topics mentioned in this week’s Parashah is Sotah, a case related to infidelity.

The Torah and the Sages discuss this topic in depth and describe not only the obvious consequences of adultery but also the factors that contribute to this deviation or to a suspicion of infidelity, and the behaviors that prevent it and strengthen fidelity.

In the following lines, I will briefly refer to a few topics directly or indirectly related to preserving sexual exclusivity in a Jewish marriage.

Sanctifying Sexual Intimacy

Unlike other religions, Judaism perceives sexuality as something positive and even sacred. Our Sages explained that our behavior should aspire to emulate God. He is compassionate, equitable, and magnanimous. Likewise, we must incorporate these characteristics into our own conduct. This “imitation of God” reaches its highest point when husband and

wife become the “creators” of a new life. Procreation offers us an opportunity—unparalleled in any other act in life—to imitate the Almighty Creator of the world.

Sexuality also completes us: it leads us to physical and emotional plenitude as individuals. The first biblical reference to sexuality states: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). From this verse, the Sages deduced that a man or a woman should consider themselves as half a person (pelag gufa), and that human fulfillment can only be achieved through marital intimacy.

Sexuality is certainly sacred, but it is also vulnerable to corruption. The Torah recounts the generation of the Flood, where sexual corruption and rape were the first symptoms of the moral decay of that corrupt generation. For those people, sex ceased to be an act that brought humans closer to the Divine. They treated sex as if it had no relation to love and holiness, considering it simply casual and unbound—a means to satisfy primal instincts.

Because of its importance and its creative (and destructive) power, sexuality needs to be “sanctified” (qiddushin). The sanctification of sexuality takes place when it is expressed exclusively within the context of marriage. This allows us to imitate the Creator and helps us intimately know the person we love the most, transforming us into something more significant than just the “I”: a “WE” (husband, wife, children).

Sex outside of marriage is destructive. Infidelity often plays a decisive role in most divorce cases; adultery is usually the final red line that has been crossed. Infidelity distances a person from God and from those one loves the most: the wife or husband and the children.

Preserving Passion

But Judaism goes beyond limiting sexuality to the context of

marriage. It is also crucial to preserve the sexual attraction between husband and wife and to avoid anything that can harm or destroy it. The Mitzvah of Niddah strengthens fidelity. A Jewish married couple abstains from sexual activity for approximately two weeks each month, corresponding to the woman's menstrual cycle plus seven more days. When the Sages of the Talmud, specifically Rabbi Meir, explained the reason behind this regulation, they said that thanks to this period of physical separation, husband and wife are able to rekindle their desire for each other. In other words, far from negatively affecting sexual desire, this period of separation intensifies it, preventing one of the greatest challenges that marriages face: boredom and sexual monotony. This problem, well known and analyzed by psychologists and sexologists, arises from the theoretically unlimited opportunities for intimacy in a marital relationship, which can drive a person to look outside for sexual novelty, leading to infidelity.

Rabbi Meir explained that during the days of physical separation, a Jewish husband desires his wife, and his physical attraction to her intensifies as the night of the Mikveh (the ritual immersion that concludes the period of abstinence) approaches. And when the wife returns from the Mikveh—even in the case of a couple who have been married for many years—the desire between them is regenerated "with the passion they felt on their wedding night." It is as if the Niddah period creates a new honeymoon every month. (Someone said that if this extraordinary Mitzvah didn't exist, it would have to be invented!)

This period of separation also promotes a deeper level of interaction between husband and wife. The couple learns to communicate affectionately on the level of friendship. Every couple should aspire to achieve this level of non-physical relationship that will strengthen the marriage for the rest of their lives. Especially as the years go by and sexual desire naturally diminishes, the friendship between husband and wife

will flourish, based on that “platonic relationship” built over the years during the Niddah periods.

Preserving Fidelity

In Jewish tradition, laws and codes of conduct are specifically designed to prevent infidelity, or anything that leads to it. One of these rules is known as “Yichud”: when a man and a woman who are not married to each other isolate themselves in a secluded place. The Sages mention it as one of the mistakes made by the Sotah, raising well-founded suspicions of adultery. The story of Amnon and Tamar in the book of Samuel illustrates the importance of Yichud. Amnon, one of King David’s sons, had a sexual obsession with Tamar, his half-sister. In order to be alone with her, he pretended to be sick and asked for her help. He requested that everyone leave his room, and once alone with his half-sister, Amnon abused her. This devastating event deeply impacted King David, who felt guilty for not realizing what was happening in his own family. To prevent similar cases from recurring in the future, King David, together with his Court of Justice, instituted the law of Yichud, which prohibits a Jewish man from being alone in a locked room with a woman who is not his wife.

The prohibition of Yichud falls into the category of “gedarim” or “siyagim,” which translates as “security measures” or halakhic fences intended to prevent people from succumbing to more significant transgressions. An equivalent of a “siyag” would be a ranger erecting a fence a few steps away from a cliff, to protect visitors from getting too close and accidentally falling into the void.

Similar preventive mechanisms exist, for example, in the field of addictions. A person struggling with alcohol addiction is advised to avoid bars and gatherings where alcohol is served, and to refrain from socializing with friends who drink. These “social fences” protect people from their own impulses and

prevent the possibility of facing temptations they cannot control. It is easier to avoid entering a bar than to resist drinking once the drink is within reach.

Similarly, the rabbis recognized the power of the sexual instinct and emphasized that relying solely on common sense and personal morality is insufficient (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□□□□□). Additional rules and fences are required to prevent potentially catastrophic situations. By avoiding Yichud—private seclusion between a man and a woman—the natural scenario in which infidelity or inappropriate sexual behavior develops is prevented.

The concept of Yichud is recognized and increasingly practiced in our day, even in non-Jewish society. It is very common for legal advisors to recommend that therapists, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals avoid staying alone in a closed room with a patient or client of the opposite sex, in order to prevent inappropriate situations or allegations of misconduct. This demonstrates the advanced wisdom of the Torah and our Sages, who established these laws thousands of years ago—laws that are now widely recognized, valued, and adopted throughout the civilized world.

Communication and Fidelity

In Judaism, sexuality is reserved exclusively for the intimate relationship between husband and wife. This simple but crucial idea also implies that certain types of interaction between married men and women should be avoided—beyond seclusion or Yichud—even in the field of communication.

Affectionate or sexual language and comments, or sensual behavior from a man toward a woman who is not his wife, are considered inappropriate. Similarly, a Jewish wife should reserve her physical charm for her husband, ensuring that her behavior and appearance in public are not provocative and that they reflect this exclusivity.

These principles of moral conduct are not very popular in contemporary society, where sexuality has been objectified through advertising, pornography, and the media. The widespread exploitation of sex—and modern permissive culture—has normalized inappropriate sexual behavior, and intimacy is no longer widely perceived as something exclusive between spouses and bound to marriage.

And this is precisely why preserving our Jewish codes of conduct while living in a society that promotes contrary values represents one of the most formidable challenges that we Jews face today. But it is imperative to do so if we seek harmony in our marriage and the happiness of our family. And to do that, we must recognize the behaviors that enable infidelity, or that provoke justifiable jealousy from a spouse.

Let us consider one last example.

The Torah teaches us that infidelity can sometimes develop unintentionally, through the exchange of emotional communication between a married man and a woman. The first time the Torah describes sexual relations, it uses the verb "to know": "And Adam knew Eve, his wife." This "knowing" refers to the emotional connection that precedes—and leads to!—physical intimacy. When a couple goes on their first date, they treat each other respectfully and cordially. Then comes friendship, which slowly develops into an emotional relationship, recognized when communication between man and woman includes the subject of feelings. When this level is reached, the couple is ready for intimacy—that is, for marriage.

If we observe this progression from respect to intimacy, we can understand why the Sages warned that, beyond preventing physical contact or seclusion with someone of the opposite sex, a married person should avoid repeating a similar progression—which might develop unintentionally and

unconsciously—with a person of the opposite sex in their professional or social life.

The Sages describe this emotional closeness as “qiruv da’at”: when a woman and a man share and communicate to one another their private feelings and intimate information. Although initially the content of that information may not be related to the sexual sphere, this level of emotional communication enables feelings of closeness that might lead to intimacy.

A married man should avoid this type of communication, especially with a person of the opposite sex with whom he routinely interacts, such as an employee or a colleague in the workplace. Likewise, a married woman should avoid emotional dialogues with a coach, a therapist, or a teacher. These emotional interactions, qiruv da’at, do not turn into intimacy overnight, but they develop gradually.

Preserving fidelity is the cornerstone of the Jewish family and of the emotional well-being of our loved ones. This requires remaining vigilant and respecting the boundaries that prevent situations which can progressively become more difficult to control. The laws of Niddah, Yichud, and qiruv da’at—each from a different perspective—contribute to safeguarding fidelity, the most sacred and essential aspect of our family life.

NASO: The blessing of the Kohanim

Birkat Kohanim is the blessing that HaShem bestows upon us through the Kohanim. This blessing appears in our Perasha, NASO and consists of three biblical verses (pesuqim),

organized in a very precise mathematical progression: the first pasuq has 3 words and 15 letters, the second 5 words and 20 letters, and the third 7 words and 25 letters.

Each pasuq consists of two blessings for the recipient of the blessing.

Verse 1: Material blessing and good health.

Verse 2. Wisdom and Grace

Verse 3. HaShem's attention and peace.

□ □□□□□ The first pasuq says: "May HaShem (= God) bless you and protect you."

Which means: May HaShem grant you all the material blessings you need (yebarekhekha), a house, food, clothing, etc. In the second blessing (veishmerekha) we ask that HaShem protect us from diseases or accidents. These blessings complement each other: we need money to buy food, clothing, etc. But we also need the blessing of good health, one of the few things that cannot be acquired with money. Obviously, a blessing is not a magic formula. To receive this and the other blessings we need to become an appropriate recipient of that blessing. We have to merit it and we have to make our effort and stay healthy, drive our cars with care, and do everything possible to avoid any kind of accidents, etc.

□ □□□ The second pasuq says: "May HaShem enlighten you with His presence and favor you."

The subject of this Pasuq is not material but rather intelctual blessings. "May HaShem enlighten you" means that we expect HaShem to help us and inspire us to obtain a very special type of wisdom, the wisdom to understand the Tora. The biblical words "May HaShem enlighten you" □□□ allude to that spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. The second blessing of this verse is □□, grace or favor: HaShem to bless us with a

good character, to inspire us to be loved by people, to find grace in the eyes of others. The first blessing refers to our spiritual and intellectual talents. The second to what is called today “emotional intelligence,” the blessing of being accepted and loved by the people around us.

□ □□□ The third pasuq says:” May HaShem direct His Presence toward you and grant you peace. ”

Our rabbis explained that there is no greater blessing for the Jewish people than peace □□□□. We Jews do not aspire to destroy our enemies and control the world. Our aspirations are noble and very simple. We only ask to live in peace. In order to serve our God, fulfilling His Tora in our own land, Israel. These are ALL our national aspirations.

Returning to the first part of this berakha, it literally says: “May HaShem direct His “Face” towards you.” Obviously God has no “face”. Our rabbis explain that this expression means: “May HaShem pay attention to you.” This is probably the most important blessing. Let’s explain it with a simple example. What must I do to deserve this extraordinary privilege? What do I have to do to make God direct His face / His attention to me? Imagine a class in a huge auditorium with hundreds of students. Everyone came to listen to a lecture that will be given by a very famous teacher. Upon entering the auditorium the teacher looks at the audience and welcomes everyone. But suddenly he stops and looks at one of the students, someone sitting in the fifth row. The teacher fixes his eyes on him for a few seconds, smiles at him, and greets him with his hand. At the end of the lecture the other students approach the privileged student and ask: Why did the teacher turn his face towards you, why did he pay a special attention to you? The student responds: “It is because during last year I have read his books, I exchanged some emails with him, asked him some questions and tried to contact him by phone” .

If we want to be the recipients of this blessing, if we want to be identified by HaShem and deserve His special attention, “We must be known by Him”, by studying His works and connecting with Him as often as we can. Thus, we will become an appropriate recipient all His blessings.

QEDOSHIM & THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. “I am HaShem your God”
Vayiqra 19:2 – Qedoshim tihiyu ki qadosh ani HaShem Eloheikhem
The parasha begins by reaffirming the spiritual foundation of the entire Tora: the identity of the people of Israel as a nation consecrated to God. HaShem is the supreme Legislator, whose authority is not based on power or fear, but on holiness. His laws are not arbitrary or oppressive, like Pharaoh’s, but are directed toward the good and dignity of the human being.
2. “You shall have no other gods”
Vayiqra 19:4 – Lo tifnu el ha’elilim
One must not turn to idols or so-called supernatural powers. No kind of “superpower,” magical energy, or spiritual force apart from HaShem may be believed in or invoked. This Mitsva is a statement against superstition, occultism, and any form of idolatry—modern or ancient.
3. “You shall not take the name of HaShem in vain”
Vayiqra 19:12 – Ve’lo tishabe’u bishmi la’sheker
This verse details the improper use of the Divine Name, especially in legal contexts. One may not swear falsely or use the name of HaShem to justify a lie. This Mitsva is a direct continuation of the principle of absolute reverence for the Creator.
4. “Remember the Shabbat to sanctify it”
Vayiqra 19:30 – Et Shabbetotai tishmoru
Qedoshim briefly mentions Shabbat next to respect for parents. The mere mention of it as a Divine command reinforces its centrality in Jewish life. In a later text, BeHar, the Tora is going to extend the Shabbat rest to the land: the Seventh year or Shemita. Observing Shabbat is an act of Emuna and recognition of Divine creation.
5. “Honor your father and your mother”
Vayiqra 19:3 – Ish imo ve’abiv tira’u
Here, the word used is not “honor” but “reverence” or “awe.” Chakhamim explain that honor refers to assisting and caring for one’s parents, especially in old age. Reverence, on the other hand, means for example: not contradicting them, not calling them by name, and not sitting in their designated place. Both attitudes are necessary for a healthy relationship with our parents throughout our life: as children, respecting them, and when our parents need at at an older age, by honoring, taking care of them. .
6. “You shall not murder”
Vayiqra 19:16 – Lo ta’amod al dam re’ekha
Qedoshim takes the prohibition of murder further: forbids indifference when someone’s life is at risk. If someone is in danger and you can help, you are obligated to intervene. Human life is sacred, and failing to act in the face of danger is also a form of violence.
7. “You shall not commit adultery”
Vayiqra 20:10 – Ve’ish asher yinaf et eshet ish
Qedoshim addresses prohibited relationships directly. Adultery is clearly mentioned and its consequences are set forth. Holiness is also expressed in the family and marital sphere. A long text of Achare Mot, the previosu Parasha is dedicated to sexual morality.
8. “You shall not steal”
Vayiqra 19:11 – Lo tignobu
The almost identical word appears here, but in a different context. In Qedoshim, it refers to the theft of material goods—property, money, belongings—while elsewhere it may refer to kidnapping. Additionally, the prohibition is expanded to include all kinds of fraud: lying in business, deceiving customers, withholding wages. The message is clear: a just society is built on economic integrity.
9. “You shall not bear false witness”
Vayiqra 19:16 – Lo telekh rakhil be’amekha
Although it doesn’t mention the courtroom directly, this Mitsva forbids gossip, slander, and defamation. Speaking ill of others, spreading rumors, or creating divisions within the community is also a way of undermining truth and justice—just like false testimony.
10. “You shall not covet”
Vayiqra 19:18 – Lo tikom ve’lo titor
Qedoshim warns against the desire for revenge and holding grudges—emotions related to covetousness. The Tora not only demands control over actions but also over destructive feelings. And it concludes with a revolutionary command: Ve’ahabta lere’akha kamokha – You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Far from envying our peers, the Tora invites us to act with empathy, generosity, and solidarity toward each other .

SHEMINI: Should Jews Be Vegan?

In this week's Parasha, the Tora introduces us to the diet of the Jewish people, Kashrut. This diet does not necessarily have to do with physical wellness, like a low-carb diet or other diets we follow today. Kashrut has to do explicitly with a "special" behavior", or Qedusha (holiness) that HaShem demands from us. As the Tora itself tells us in Vayqra (11:44): "For I am HaShem, your God. You must purify yourselves and be Holy, because I am Holy. Do not impurify yourself with [impure = Non Kosher] animals …. But how is holiness related to a diet or to a specific kind of animal? Regardless of the reason why certain animals are permitted and others are not allowed (which should be the subject of a different conversation) the fact that certain foods are permitted, and other food are forbidden to train us to reach Qedusha.

In the Tora, holiness, or in Hebrew Qedusha, has to do with self-control and discipline. Especially in those areas of human behavior related to the satisfaction of primary instincts. Particularly with regard to what we consume and with the area of □□sexuality. When we exercise our free will, we develop this "power" to control our impulses, which sets us apart from animals. Living beings, except for humans, cannot attain any Qedusha because they are "natural" beings. And as part of their nature, they cannot control, and "say NO", to their primary impulses. Thanks to the fact that we think with words –and we grasp reality linguistically– we humans "have room for possible responses when we are driven by an instinct". We possess freedom of choice or "response" - "ability". Qedusha is reached when we practice a behavior

that positions us on a level above nature, and closer to HaShem. On this subject, the Gemara in Pesachim (49b) says something very interesting. Not all people have the right to eat meat. There is a category of individuals who, according to Ribbi Yehuda haNasi, should not consume meat. □□ :□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□□□. *"An uneducated person cannot consume meat."* In this context, "Uneducated" refers to a person with no discipline or self-control. A person incapable of saying NO to his or her impulses. These individuals are not granted the right to eat meat, because they are not on a level above the animals.

We, Jews, train ourselves to self-control from a very young age. I remember once, at a Bar Mitzva party, a non-Jewish gentleman approached me and congratulated me for one of my children. This is more or less what he told me: "Rabbi, how do you do it? What did you do to educate a 5-year-old child to have self-discipline? I have 3 children, one of that age. And the truth is that I cannot deal with their appetites. Children today are voracious consumers, trained by modern society to consume everything that presents itself before their insatiable eyes … Your child, however, is different. I just offered him some candy. He took it and thanked me. But, to my surprise, before putting the candy in his mouth, he went to ask his older brother if he could eat it… So tell me: What is your secret? What gift did you promise your children if they do not eat candy? Did you threaten them with some harsh punishment? " I replied that there were no rewards or threats. And that my son is not the only child with this level of self-discipline. Actually, any Jewish child whose family observes the laws of Kashrut, has that same level of self-control. I also confessed (and as I said it, I surprised myself to hear it) that I never had to explain to my children the laws of Kashrut. They learned from imitating what they saw from their parents and siblings.

The Tora which teaches us to reach a level of discipline that

elevates us over nature and over our instincts.

PEQUDE: Being Honest and Looking Honest

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ABOVE SUSPICION?

This week we continue reading about the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle or Temple, which the people of Israel erected in the desert. The construction of the Mishkan involved raising of funds that were generously and spontaneously donated by the Israelites . The donations consisted of: fabrics, furs, woods and especially precious stone and metals. The amount donated by the people was enough to build the Mishkan. And then, there was also a surplus! Moshe was the general administrator of these funds. And although Moshe Rabbenu was the humblest of all men, and at the same time the only human being who "spoke" to God, some people from that difficult generation suggested that Moshe might have kept for himself some public funds… When Moshe heard these unfounded rumors he said, according to the Midrash: "When the construction of the Mishkan is completed, I will give an exact report of everything that was collected and everything that was spent in the Mishkan." And this is how our Parasha begins: "El-le pequde haMishkan … "which means: "*This is the report of [all that was used ror the building of] the Mishkan*."

Moshe's account was very detailed and thorough. He gave a very precise number of everything that was used. In an emblematic pasuq, that shows the precsion of the report, the Tora says: *"And with the 1775 pieces of silver he made the nails of the*

columns”, this were the nails or hooks that held the curtains of the Mishkan.

HONEST REPORT

What happened with Moshe was very painful. In fact, it was the first time that public funds were collected and administered in the history of the Jewish people. But this lamentable episode, people questioning the integrity of community leaders, was taken since then as a guideline to be followed by any Jewish leader who manages or has access to public funds: it is not enough to proceed with integrity; one must also do everything in his or her power to avoid arousing any suspicion of mishandling public funds. In the words of our Sages: □□□□□□□‘ □□ □□□□□ □□□□□□ “One must not just “be” honest, but also “look” honest in the eyes of the people of Israel”. The Gemara bring several examples of the leaders who had access to public funds and the way they behaved.

GARMU & SONS

The Garmu family was in charge of preparing the *lechem hapanim* in the Bet haMiqdash. This bread, 12 large loaves that were placed on a special table, had to be prepared with extra fine white flour, and with a “secret” formula, since it had to stay fresh for a week, and these loaves could not contain yeast. The secret recipe was kept very discreetly by this family, Garmu, who transmitted the formula of the preparation of this bread from generation to generation. Now, the Garmu family had a very special habit, which they also kept for generations. In their homes they never made bread with fine flour. The bread of the Garmu was made with whole flour, considered then as of lower category, used by poor people. Why they did not use fine

flour fror their own bread? To avoid any suspicions that they are using the flour of the *lechem hapanim* for their own private consumption.

ABTINAS & SONS

There was another important family in Yerushalayim: the Abtinas. They were in charge of preparing the qetoret, the incense that was used in the Bet HaMiqdash. They also had a secret professional formula to prepare the qetoret (ma'ase roqeach). For example: Although we know the exact ingredients and quantities used for the qetoret, there was a mysterious little plant called ma'ale 'ashan. And a minimal quantity of this plant would made the qetoret smoke rise vertically, instead of expanding, which was ritually required. Only this family knew how to identify this plant that had this effect on the qetoret, and kept their secret from generation to generation. The Abtinas family also had a very healthy habit: the women of that family never used perfumes! In those days, perfumes were made with the same elements used for the qetoret. And the family Abtinas did not want anyone to suspect that they had used any of the ingredients of the qetoret to make their own perfumes. Thins, when young women got engaged to a member of the Abtinas family, they had to promise that they will never use any perfume, to avoid any suspicion on misusing public funds.

PEQUDE: Love is in the

details

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Perhpas late… but not too late….

I think it was when I had my third child that I learned one of the most valuable lessons in the education of the little ones: how to “read” their drawings. All children draw. Without exception, our children need us to appreciate and admire their art. Mainly when the artwork is dedicated to us: parents! Nobody taught me how to read and admire a drawing… and before I learned this valuable lesson, all I did, intuitively, was look at the drawing for a few seconds and say: “What a beautiful drawing!” or “What a work of art!” and that’s it. A short phrase with enthusiasm – sometimes deliberately overenthusiastic – was my way of showing admiration for my children’s drawings.

Then, I learned that this was not enough. The art that our children dedicate to us must be “read and appreciated” carefully, *looking at the details as we comment on them aloud*, following with our index all the minor details we find. *“How many windows this house has? And the curtains…they are so beautiful! What are they made of? Velvet? This door is very similar to our door! And you also draw the Mezuza!!! What a lovely tree! And those beautiful red fruits, what are they? They look like yummy apples … What a beautiful chimney. How many bricks does it have? Let’s cunt them … one, two, three, four, … and the smoke: it reaches the clouds. “*

By commenting on the details we identify in the drawing, we recreate the drawing process of the young artists for our

little ones. And the more details we can identify, the less indifferent we will be to our children's work of art, and the more love we will transmit to them. Because, as someone very intelligently said: "The opposite of love is not hatred but indifference". The less indifference, the more the love. Understood?

If we learn this great lesson in "parenting," we will better understand this week's Parasha.

The text of the Tora that we will be reading tomorrow can become frustrating if we do not have this idea in mind. Because the Tora repeats too many details about the Mishkan (the Tabernacle), and as some commentators indicated, it would have been sufficient for the Tora to describe the whole process with two lines: *"And the children of Israel built the Mishkan, just as God had ordered it."* Why was it necessary to abound in so much detail? Unless we understand that the Mishkan was to our Creator what our children's drawing is to us …

What was the Mishkan? The Mishkan (literally: "residence" or "house") was the Sanctuary that we Jews dedicated to HaShem. A meeting point between us and Him. A residence that permanently reminded us of the presence of God among us. Similar to what a Synagogue represents today. The Mishkan was built by "volunteers," not by slaves. And there were no forced taxes imposed on the people. The materials came from voluntary donations by ordinary Israelites in the desert. It was an act of love from the people of Israel to the Creator, who rescued them from slavery. And these innumerable demonstrations of our affection did not go unnoticed by the Creator.

The Tora expresses God's appreciation for the love we Jews showed in building the Mishkan by mentioning every object, artifact, and material used to build this "House," like a parent who looks carefully and lovingly at his child's drawing and enthusiastically mentions each one of its little details.