Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Kedoshim
May 11, 2024 *** 3 Iyar, 5784

Kedoshim in a Nutshell
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/75894/jewish/Kedoshim-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Kedoshim," means "holy [ones]" and it is found in Leviticus 19:2.

The Parshah of Kedoshim begins with the statement: "You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy." This is followed by dozens of mitzvot (divine commandments) through which the Jew sanctifies him- or herself and relates to the holiness of G-d.

These include: the prohibition against idolatry, the mitzvah of charity, the principle of equality before the law, Shabbat, sexual morality, honesty in business, honor and awe of one's parents, and the sacredness of life.

Also in Kedoshim is the dictum which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called a cardinal principle of Torah, and of which Hillel said, "This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary"—"Love your fellow as yourself."

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Ezekiel 20:2-20
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/668555/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftorah mentions G-d's repeated enjoinders to observe the commandments, keep the Shabbat and eschew idol worship; reflective of this week's Torah portion, which discusses many commandments, including the obligation to sanctify the Shabbat and reject idolatry.

The prophet Ezekiel transmit G-d's message, reminding the Jews how He chose them as His nation, how He took them out of Egypt and promised to take them to the Holy Land. In Egypt, G-d dispatched a prophet who exhorted the Jews to abandon their idols, yet they did not do so. He then gave them laws and statutes, including that of the observance of Shabbat as a sign between Him and His people. "But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they walked not in My statutes, and they despised My ordinances, which, if a man keep, he will live through them, and My Sabbaths they desecrated exceedingly."

The prophet goes on to mention G-d's punishment of the Jews in the desert, namely that they did not enter the Holy Land. He then admonishes the children

not to follow their fathers' ways, but to observe the laws and to sanctify the Shabbat.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Judaism's Three Voices: Kedoshim (5771) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/kedoshim/judaisms-three-voices/

The nineteenth chapter of Vayikra, with which our parsha begins, is one of the supreme statements of the ethics of the Torah. It's about the right, the good and the holy, and it contains some of Judaism's greatest moral commands: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," and "Let the stranger who lives among you be like your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt."
But the chapter is also surpassingly strange. It contains what looks like a random jumble of commands, many of which have nothing whatever to do with ethics and only the most tenuous connection with holiness:

> Do not mate different kinds of animals.
> Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.
> Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material. *Vayikra 19:19*
>
> Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it.
> Do not practise divination or sorcery.
> Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. *Vayikra 19:26-28*

And so the list goes on. What have these to do with the right, the good, and the holy?

To understand this we have to engage in an enormous leap of insight into the unique moral/social/spiritual vision of the Torah, so unlike anything we find elsewhere.

The West has had many attempts at defining a moral system. Some focused on rationality, others on emotions like sympathy and empathy. For some the central principle was service to the state, for others moral duty, for yet others the greatest happiness of the greatest number. These are all forms of moral simplicity.

Judaism insists on the opposite: moral complexity. The moral life isn't easy. Sometimes duties or loyalties clash. Sometimes reason says one thing, emotion another. More fundamentally, Judaism identified three distinct moral sensibilities each of which has its own voice and vocabulary. They are [1] the ethics of the king, [2] the ethics of the priest and fundamentally, [3] the ethics of the prophet.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel talk about their distinctive sensibilities:

> For the teaching of the law [Torah] by the priest will not cease,
> nor will counsel [*etzah*] from the wise [*chacham*],
> nor the word [*davar*] from the prophets. *Jer. 18:18*

> They will go searching for a vision *[chazon]* from the prophet, priestly instruction in the law [Torah] will cease, the counsel *[etzah]* of the elders will come to an end. *Ez. 7:26*

Priests think in terms of Torah. Prophets have "the Word" or "a vision." Elders and the wise have "*etzah*". What does this mean?

Kings and their courts are associated in Judaism with wisdom – *chochmah*, *etzah* and their synonyms. Several books of Tanach, most conspicuously Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (Mishlei and Kohelet), are books of "wisdom" of which the supreme exemplar was King Solomon. Wisdom in Judaism is the most universal form of knowledge, and the Wisdom literature is the closest the Hebrew Bible comes to the other literature of the ancient Near East, as well as the Hellenistic Sages. It is practical, pragmatic, based on experience and observation; it is judicious, prudent. It is a prescription for a life that is safe and sound, without excess or extremes, but hardly dramatic or transformative. That is the voice of wisdom, the virtue of kings.

The prophetic voice is quite different, impassioned, vivid, radical in its critique of the misuse of power and the exploitative pursuit of wealth. The prophet speaks on behalf of the people, the poor, the downtrodden, the abused. He or she thinks of the moral life in terms of relationships: between God and humanity and between human beings themselves. The key terms for the prophet are *tzedek* (distributive justice), *mishpat* (retributive justice), *chessed* (loving kindness) and *rachamim* (mercy, compassion). The prophet has emotional intelligence, sympathy and empathy, and feels the plight of the lonely and oppressed. Prophecy is never abstract. It doesn't think in terms of universals. It responds to the here and now of time and place. The priest hears the word of God for all time. The prophet hears the word of God for this time.

The ethic of the priest, and of holiness generally, is different again. The key activities of the priest are *lehavdil* – to discriminate, distinguish and divide – and *lehorot* – to instruct people in the law, both generally as teachers and in specific instances as judges. The key words of the priest are *kodesh* and *chol* (holy and secular), *tamei* and *tahor* (impure and pure).

The single most important passage in the Torah that speaks in the priestly voice is

Chapter 1 of Bereishit, the narrative of creation. Here too a key verb is *lehavdil*, to divide, which appears five times. God divides between light and dark, the upper and lower waters, and day and night. Other key words are "bless" – God blesses the animals, humankind, and the seventh day; and "sanctify" (*kadesh*) – at the end of creation God sanctifies the Shabbat. Overwhelmingly elsewhere in the Torah the verb *lehavdil* and the root *kadosh* occur in a priestly context; and it is the priests who bless the people.

The task of the priest, like God at creation, is to bring order out of chaos. The priest establishes boundaries in both time and space. There are holy times and holy places, and each time and place has its own integrity, its own setting in the total scheme of things. The kohen's protest is against the blurring of boundaries so common in pagan religions – between gods and humans, between life and death, between the sexes and so on. A sin, for the kohen, is an act in the wrong place, and its punishment is exile, being cast out of your rightful place. A good society, for the kohen, is one in which everything is in its proper place, and the kohen has special sensitivity toward the stranger, the person who has no place of his or her own.

The strange collection of commands in Kedoshim thus turns out not to be strange at all. The holiness code sees love and justice as part of a total vision of an ordered universe in which each thing, person and act has their rightful place, and it is this order that is threatened when the boundary between different kinds of animals, grain, fabrics is breached; when the human body is lacerated; or when people eat blood, the sign of death, in order to feed life.

In the secular West we are familiar with the voice of wisdom. It is common ground between the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and the great sages from Aristotle to Marcus Aurelius to Montaigne. We know, too, the prophetic voice and what Einstein called its "almost fanatical love of justice." We are far less familiar with the priestly idea that just as there is a scientific order to nature, so there is a moral order, and it consists in keeping separate the things that are separate, and maintaining the boundaries that respect the integrity of the world God created and seven times pronounced good.

The priestly voice is not marginal to Judaism. It is central, essential. It is the voice of the Torah's first chapter. It is the voice that defined the Jewish vocation as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." It dominates Vayikra, the central book of the Torah. And whereas the prophetic spirit lives on in *aggadah*, the priestly voice prevails in *halachah*. And the very name *Torah* – from the verb *lehorot* – is a priestly word.

Perhaps the idea of ecology, one of the key discoveries of modern times, will allow

us to understand better the priestly vision and its code of holiness, both of which see ethics not just as practical wisdom or prophetic justice but also as honouring the deep structure – the sacred ontology – of being. An ordered universe is a moral universe, a world at peace with its Creator and itself.

Kedoshim: Love Thy Neighbor, Not Thy Empire by Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg
https://truah.org/resources/danya-ruttenberg-kedoshim-moraltorah_2024_/

Every year, during this time, we count the Omer — marking the days between Pesach and Shavuot, from liberation from an oppressive, dehumanizing empire to receiving instructions about our path forward in service to the divine.

The beginning of this period is treated as a time of communal mourning, in which we do not cut hair, hold weddings, listen to music and the like. We're told (Yevamot 62b, Shulchan Aruch OC 493:1-2) this is because Rabbi Akiva's students got mysteriously ill during this time — and then mysteriously better on Lag BaOmer, so we observe it as a day of celebration.

As it happens, we read Rabbi Akiva's favorite parshah right around now, too — Kedoshim.

In it, we find the verse that he referred to as the "*clal gadol*," the "great principle," of Torah. (Jerusalem Talmud Nedarim 30b).

It's also the center of Torah — one of the defining literary motifs of biblical literature is a literary device called the chiasm, which is something of a "sandwich" structure (A-B-C-B-A) and in which the middle point — the middle word, verse, chapter, and so forth — is regarded as the most significant.

And if Leviticus is the middle book of Torah, Leviticus 19 is the middle chapter. And the middle verse? Leviticus 19:18. That *clal gadol*.

"*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your fellow as yourself: I am God.*"

That's the beating, living, pulsing heart of Torah. That's what pumps blood out to the rest of Judaism, the rest of mitzvot, the rest of spirituality, the rest of service to the divine, the rest of our work down here as people, the rest of everything.

That line.

We serve God when we care for one another down here and work towards more justice, more equity, more respect, more dignity for everyone. Everything else is commentary.

And though there are those who like to talk about this verse isolated from its context, to talk about loving as though it's not related to state power, privilege,

access to resources, and more — the Torah certainly knew better.

What else is in this chiastic sandwich? As it turns out, an awful lot of mitzvot talking to the Israelites *with power*, warning them against the abuse of that power, or instructing them to use that power to care for or protect those who are marginalized or at risk.

You must leave food behind for the poor and the stranger when you gather from your harvest and vineyard. You must pay your workers on time. Disabled people must have equal access to resources in your community. Your justice system must actually be just, and not disproportionately harm those with less money.

Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.

You must not harm yourself. You should protect against child sexual abuse and honor elders.

National "others" shall be treated with care and respect — as your citizens, and you should love them as yourself.

Your love for the national "other" — for the "resident," for the non-Jew, for the one who is not a part of our people but who "resides with you in your land." Shall "be as for yourself."

And on and on — there are more, of course.

All of these, mitzvot — commandments, laws, intractable obligations, in the general system of the covenant business — are the things that surround this centermost nugget, "You should love your neighbor as yourself."

It's not warm and fuzzy.

It's not sweet.

It's actually *incredibly* specific.

How you love your neighbor as yourself is a series of concrete actions lived out in the world. What would you want if you were hungry? To live in a society that ensured that you had accessible food. If you're a worker? To be paid on time. If you're disabled? Your neighbors will not create obstacles to your participation or do something to make you unsafe. If you're struggling to get by financially and run into legal issues, you'd want to live somewhere that doesn't disproportionately incarcerate those who are poor or close to poverty, and enable the wealthy to get off scot-free. And so on.

How you love your neighbor *as yourself* is that you must set up systems that are just in actual reality.

How we love our neighbor is by fighting for a society in which we would be glad to

live no matter how little privilege we had.

How we love our neighbor is by taking seriously the systemic change that must happen through a disability justice lens, a racial justice lens, a gender justice lens, an economic and labor justice lens. By addressing, with urgency, policing and carceral systems as they exist today. By radically reworking — as we consider the horrors that have unfolded in Israel/Palestine this year — our relationships with the "residents who reside with you in the land." The non-Jews with whom we share space. And so much more.

Rabbi Akiva certainly knew this.

He was extremely involved in the Bar Kochba Revolt (132-136 CE), the last-stand uprising against Roman oppression and occupation in what's now Israel/Palestine (which, sadly, turned out to be a disaster for the Jewish people). Many have posited that this time of mourning during the Omer is actually because his battles against Rome weren't going very well — and, perhaps, we celebrate on Lag BaOmer because it's the anniversary of a military success, however fleeting.

Loving our neighbor was no less than a revolutionary proposition, the opposite of everything for which Rome stood.

We cannot live Torah and exploit, oppress, send cops in riot gear, deny aid flotillas to starving people, bomb civilians, or engage in any of the other oppressive tools of Empire. It's simply not possible. We must, in ways small and large, fight for societies that we would be glad to experience, no matter where we existed in the ecosystem.

And every year, during this season, our growing hair inscribes this awareness onto our bodies, trying to remind us who we have always been, who we have always meant to be. *(Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg is the award-winning author of eight books, most recently "On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World." She now makes her primary writing home at LifeIsASacredText.com. Next month, T'ruah will honor her with a Rabbinic Human Rights Hero Award.)*

Who among Us Is Holy? Kedoshim by Talia Kaplan
https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/who-among-us-is-holy/

When God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites קדשים תהיו, "You shall be holy," the injunction is to be delivered אֶל־כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, "to the entire community of Israel" (Lev. 19:2). This week's parashah opens with a message that seems easy to get behind. The question, though, of what it actually means to be holy, is answered by commentators in a way that paints a more complicated picture. Rashi

explains that being holy entails refraining from forbidden sexual relations and transgressive thoughts, which are delineated both in this and the previous parashah.

Many of these—"Do not sleep with a menstruating woman," "Do not degrade your daughter," etc.—put the emphasis on the male, not surprising given how personhood and sexuality were understood at the time (Lev. 18:19, 19:29). But these human interactions involve multiple parties. How might this section of the Torah inform the ways we today think about embodied mitzvot and the holiness of the entire community of Israel? Is there a way to hold earlier understandings of the mitzvot, the challenges of reading ancient texts about sexual ethics in light of contemporary values, and the belief that the Torah speaks to all of us at all times?

As a feminist, observant Jew, I believe there has to be. My academic work at JTS engages a disability justice approach to halakhah, using forbidden sexual relations—specifically the laws around menstruation—as a case study. [1] What might it mean to treat all of our bodies as holy? In reflecting on this question raised by the opening to Parashat Kedoshim, I suggest we turn to the resurgence of hilkhot niddah in liberal communities and the academic field of disability studies.

Hilkhot niddah, like many areas of Jewish law about non-male bodies written by men, has its fair share of complications. Yet many observant Jews, including some liberal Jews, practice niddah. There are many reasons why, including a desire for halakhah to comprehensively inform our day-to-day lives. In her 2014 teshuvah, Rabbi Pamela Barmash spoke to such a phenomenon in the context of gender and obligation, writing, "Being permitted to perform a mitzvah is not the same as being required to perform a mitzvah, and women want to express their commitment to their lives as Jews by performing mitzvot on an equal basis with men." Barmash's assertion says as much about obligation more broadly as it does about women's relationship to traditionally masculine mitzvot: for many of us, being fully, holistically obligated is a core part of our Judaism. So what happens when our foundational texts delineate the laws of niddah—or other embodied mitzvot—in a manner that does not completely align with our experiences of gender, sexuality, and/or physiology?

This dissonance offers the opportunity for a new approach. Enter the social model of disability, which understands disability as resulting from a gap between one's embodied experience and their broader physical and social environment and attempts to close that gap through systemic change, which for halakhah would entail accounting for bodily diversity from the outset. The insights gained by individuals with marginalized bodily and sexual identities—who often navigate flawed medical systems, legislative attacks, and other societal challenges—can

guide a response to the deep yearning for rituals and halakhah that resonate with our personal experiences of our bodies, especially when traditional texts seem at odds with these experiences. Integrating disability justice with halakhah provides a dual opportunity: it allows the insights of disability studies to enrich halakhic thinking and helps our communities better address diverse physical needs, affirming the holiness of the entire community of Israel.

One area of hilkhot niddah that could better account for different experiences is bedikot, the series of internal checks a menstruant[2] performs at the cessation of bleeding to exit the status of niddah.[3] People with pelvic health issues like endometriosis and vulvodynia may experience pain with insertion, as well as symptoms such as vulvar itching, incontinence, and discomfort when sitting or wearing tight pants. Hilkhot niddah have long taken into account the reality that some people might have difficulty with vaginal insertion, establishing cases in which someone would only have to do the first bedikah—hefsek tahara. Yet for those for whom even this one check is difficult, it is normative to seek out individualized guidance that might provide leniencies and heterim (permissions). Given that one in four people with vulvas are impacted by pelvic health issues at some point during their life, and the broader reasoning that we should proactively account for embodied difference, a contemporary approach to hilkhot niddah should see pelvic health issues as part of the normal range of menstrual experiences, not an anomaly to be dealt with if they come up.

A disability justice-informed approach to bodily diversity would see responding to one's physical and emotional realities not as necessitating employing a leniency, but as part and parcel of what it means to seriously live a rigorous halakhic life. While not everyone perceives "leniency" to be a bad thing, it often has a negative connotation in halakhic communities, implying that someone is choosing to be "less observant." Furthermore, in the disability community, people sometimes hesitate to use mobility aids or pursue institutional accommodations out of fear of "not being disabled enough," and a similar line of thinking could lead people to be wary of relying on a halakhic leniency. We can affirm people by relating to halakhah in a way that does not set up a strict/lenient hierarchy but rather draws them closer to Jewish practice with, to the extent possible, halakhic language that speaks to their lived experiences.

For bedikot, expanding halakhic thinking with an eye toward disability justice might include accounting for the reality that not everyone is physically able to perform a hefsek tahara and elaborating on what this might mean for the transition to shivah neki'im—the seven "clean days" between menstruation and exiting niddah status through immersion. Alternatively, for the menstruant who

observes a form of niddah that understands the entirety of niddah to be seven days and still wants to do some sort of check before going to the mikveh when night falls on/after the seventh day, it might entail discerning a rigorous way to check in with one's body that does not cause physical or emotional distress. The halakhic approach to hefsek tahara that I wish to see is one that understands that not everyone might be able to do even a single bedikah, and that this is not necessarily a temporary situation.

My proposal reflects a deeper, personal desire to navigate the tension between my own experience as a person sensitive to pain and a longstanding tradition. I know that, for me, taking both Judaism and my experience of my body seriously means engaging in a comprehensive religious practice, inclusive of niddah. This is not unique to people who have chronic health challenges. From pregnant people discussing how to think about fasting to trans folks writing teshuvot about whether to wear a chest binder when immersing in a mikveh, many of us are expressing a desire for halakhah to be informed by and speak to a diversity of lived experiences.[4] Halakhah's ability to respond to the complicated reality of human existence is part of what maintains its holiness. The extent to which we respond to the diverse embodied needs in our communities is central to answering the call for each of us to be holy. *(Talia Kaplan is assistant Rabbi at Congregation Beth Shalom in Overland Park, KS)* [1] The "Unwell" Woman: A Disability Justice Approach to Halakhah and Spiritual Care, submitted in partial fulfillment of the Jewish Gender and Women's Studies MA and Certificate in Pastoral Care and Counseling at JTS. [2] When discussing biblical and rabbinic sources, I refer to "women" in an attempt to provide a translation or summation of the source that best reflects the texts' understanding of gender and anatomy. When talking about contemporary best practices and scenarios, I use gender-inclusive language such as "menstruant." [3] How this period of time is counted largely depends on one's communities (ethnically, denominationally, etc.). [4] For example, see https://www.amitzvahtoeat.org/ and https://svara.org/trans-halakha-project/

From Hate to Love: Kedoshim by Bex Stern Rosenblatt

https://drive.google.com/file/d/12A7I4Vm89T-XNcYviaW8ThVLWlwEbKAF/view

This week, we are holy. This week, you do not "hate your brother in your heart," but rather, you "love your fellow man as yourself," because "I am the Lord." How do we get from hate to love? How do we be holy because God is holy? The path seems to involve embracing rebuke and rejecting revenge.

In these two critical verses, Leviticus 19:17-18, we read: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely reprove your fellow and not bear guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance, and you shall not harbor a grudge against the members of your people. And you shall love your fellow man as yourself. I am the Lord."

In order to love our brother as ourselves, we treat him as we treat ourselves. We break down the boundary which prevents us from telling others when they err. In doing so, we take responsibility for them. Just as we reprove ourselves, we reprove others. If this system works, we need not take vengeance. We need not harbor grudges. After all, surely our brothers have listened to what we have said, changed their ways, and we can all live happily ever after in a valley of love and peace.

Or not. The final words of this verse are "I am the Lord." This phrase shows up occasionally in Leviticus, often for emphasis. We find it tacked on to the most important of commandments. It shows up at the end of our chapter, lest we forget: "You shall faithfully observe all my laws and all my rules: I am the Lord." Clearly, the commandment to love our fellow is important. It makes sense that this formula would appear here. But perhaps it is doing more than just signaling importance. Perhaps it provides a clue to what happens when our brothers do not listen to our rebuke.

We are told not to take vengeance, *nekamah*, and not to bear a grudge, *netirah*. This is a huge ask, particularly assuming that our brothers, whom we have already rebuked, continue to do what is bad in our eyes. The word for vengeance first appears in the context of just such a wayward brother. That brother, Cain, was rebuked by God himself when he became angry at the injustice in the acceptance of his brother's sacrifice and the rejection of his own. Cain then murdered Abel. And so God introduces vengeance into the world, but not against Cain. Instead, God declares that against anyone who kills Cain sevenfold vengeance shall be exacted.

Vengeance is not something to be taken lightly. At the end of the Torah, in Parashat Haazinu, we read God's statement that vengeance belongs to him. We praise God because "He'll avenge the blood of his servants, wreak vengeance on his foes." God will wreak vengeance even on us, if we break his covenant.

When our brothers do not listen to our rebuke, we remember that vengeance is God's. We continue to rebuke them. We continue to love them. And we cry out, as in Psalm 94, "God of retribution, Lord, God of retribution, appear! Rise up, judge of the earth, give the arrogant their deserts!" *(Bex teaches Hebrew Bible and Bibliodrama. She's the North American Faculty-in-Residence for the Conservative Yeshiva.)*

Kedoishim: Societal Norms Reassessed by Rabbi Carmi Wisemom

https://www.growtorah.org/vayikra/2022/05/05-parshat-kedoshim-societal-norms-reassessed

"You shall not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person; and you shall have fear of your God—I am Hashem."[1] This directive has been widely explained

in its figurative sense of prohibiting one to lead another to his detriment. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch details actions that fall into the category of placing a stumbling block: "he who deliberately gives wrong advice, who gives the means, or prepares the way for wrong…who in any way actively or passively assists or furthers people in doing wrong….transgresses this prohibition. Thus the whole great sphere of the material and spiritual happiness of our neighbor is entrusted to our care."[2]

Rav Hirsch's conclusion carries a meaningful and somewhat eerie message for the post-industrial world. Has modern society misled us concerning our material and spiritual happiness? Have we even conflated the two?

Contained within contemporary society, lies a severe and far-reaching stumbling block, which has led to abuse of the environment by endangering the earth's delicate ecosystems and limited natural resources. At the turn of the 20th century, the Industrial Revolution allowed a higher quality of life for many Americans due to expanded production capabilities. Alongside this quality increase came a heightened emphasis on consumerism—the public mindset intent on over-consumption beyond people's actual needs. Consumerism equates personal happiness with purchasing more and more material possessions. The businesses and governments who stood to gain from increased trade overlooked the public's moral shortcomings and "blinded" them by perpetuating their pursuit of the material.

In his book, Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism, Richard H. Robbins explains that for consumerism to take hold in the United States, the public's perception and buying habits had to be transformed.[3] Advertising aggressively shaped consumer desires. It imbued commodities with the power to transform the consumer into a more desirable person. Luxuries became necessities. In 1880, $30 **m**illion was invested in advertising in the United States. Today, that figure has climbed to well over $120 **b**illion; even adjusting for inflation, that figure has jumped by about $119 billion. The advent of the credit card in the 1950s, enabled people to buy things that they would not normally consider purchasing. Originally meant to stimulate economic growth, credit shopping, unfortunately, leads to increased consumer debt.

The US Department of Commerce, created in 1921, serves to illustrate the role of the federal government in the promotion of consumption. The Commerce Department encouraged maximum consumption of commodities, producing films and leaflets advocating single-dwelling homes over multi-unit dwellings and suburban housing over urban housing. Our present standard of housing is just one example of how the powers of consumerism have changed accepted norms,

creating raised expectations of standards of living and subsequently causing us to deplete more of the earth's natural resources. [4]

Many of our environmental concerns are caused by the subtle, but potentially lethal stumbling block of consumerism. It can be found in crises such as global warming (by increased burning of fossil fuels), species extinction (through the clearing of forests), the proliferation of landfills, and subsequent contamination of water from the residue of the chemicals used to produce more material goods. While Hashem has created a planet for us to enjoy, we must be honest with ourselves in identifying the line where enjoyment becomes misuse.

So much of our lives are made easier and more efficient by industrialized systems, but there are major costs. Today we find ourselves simultaneously the victims and culprits of "lifnei iver lo titen michshol." We may wish to challenge ourselves to produce, sell, and consume fewer products. Leading up to moments where we might spend significant funds on material purchases or moments of buying a one-dollar toy, we can make a big impact by considering the consequences of our actions. The Jewish and environmental response is to reduce our levels of consumption. In a world in which we often trip into society's current norms, our goal should be to ethically and intelligently consume. It is not always easy but it is our imperative. We must strive to appreciate the benefits of industrialization, without falling prey to overconsumption. Conscious consumption is possible.

(Carmi Wisemon is the director of Sviva Israel and an Israeli high-tech professional. Carmi is the editor of the 4-volume series, The Environment in Jewish Thought and Law and a regular contributor to publications such as Chabad.org and Aish.com. He publishes a daily Talmud Daf Yomi FaceBook post) [1] Vayikra 19:14 [2] In his commentary on the Torah, Vayikra 19:14 [3] Allyn and Bacon, 1999 [4]Another example of a change in accepted norms for the worse is the credit card. Workers were given higher wages to increase their buying power in order to be able to create a consumer economy. The world's first credit card was introduced in the United States in the 1950s, expanding consumer credit by enabling people to buy things that they would not normally consider purchasing. By the 1970s shopping habits had been transformed by credit. An effect of this credit was to increase consumer debt, while creating mass markets for consumer goods that stimulated economic growth.

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Yahrtzeits

Motti Benisty remembers his father Rabbi Shimon David Benisty on Sat. May 11

Albert Gottlieb remembers his mother Gertrude Gottlieb on Wed. May 15.

Merna Most remembers her father Henry Handleman on Wed. May 15.

Ilisia Kissner remembers Steve's mother Mollie Kissner on Fri. May 17