



BORDERS

ARE THERE BORDERS IN DAILY LIFE? OF COURSE, MOST PEOPLE would say. There are borders which give space to each individual, so that he or she can still be themselves, despite the pressure of varied forces around them. There are borders between the appropriate and the non-appropriate, in terms of actions, words and thoughts. There are borders between the permitted and the forbidden.

There is even a border between the very edge of the permitted, and - somewhat closer in - the norm of behaviour advised and expected by Jewish teaching. Just because something is 'permitted', does not mean we have to do it. "Make a fence around the Torah", comment the Sages in Ethics of the Fathers¹.

Both Torah readings this week² refer to this concept. The first Sedra ends with a list of forbidden relationships, prohibiting adultery, incest and various kinds of perversion. The words "And you should guard My guarding" in the final verse are explained by the Sages as meaning: "in addition, make extra rules"³.

For many of us this idea is immediately confrontational and upsetting. Why make more prohibitions?! There are so many rules already, why add to them?!

Nonetheless, the second Sedra continues with a very similar theme. It begins with the command to be "holy". "You should be holy", says G-d. The Sages explain this means an extra level of self-restraint. The Torah forbids certain things and permits others.

117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1 7HF
cru@lubavitchuk.com - www.chabadresearch.org

However, one does not have to go right to the edge of the permitted. Hold back a little. This sense of restraint is termed holiness.

How does one respond to this? A typical answer might be: “Restraint?! Why restraint?! Surely life is to be enjoyed to the full? If G-d has given you good things, be grateful! Anyway, it’s hard enough keeping away from those things which are actually forbidden. Why not enjoy as much as one possibly can, those things which are *permitted?*”

Despite this impassioned plea, the extra borders remain important. Indeed, they are an integral part of Judaism. The same chain of teaching which declares that one activity is forbidden, and that another is permitted, also asks us to maintain additional borders. One reason is, of course, to protect the actual do’s and don’t’s of the Torah. The “fence” ensures that these are not eroded away⁴.

There is a further level. The quality of our inner lives is deeply affected by our attempts to maintain these border regions. The existence of the border emphasises the fact that we have come into the world for a spiritual purpose: to connect creation with its Creator.

For example, when we eat something we are linking ourselves with a part of existence, the food, in order to elevate it, to bond it with G-d. Everything around us has potential holiness. Our interaction with our environment is in order to reveal that holiness.

For this to take place, we have to follow the full instructions of the Torah. Not only to recognise that there is a distinction between forbidden and permitted, but also to follow the guidance of the Sages when they create borders and maintain them. Through this, we ourselves approach holiness, and so too does the entire realm of our daily lives: it becomes a domain filled with the Presence of G-d.

1. Ethics 1:1. 2. Leviticus chs. 16-18 (Acharei), and 19-20 (Kedoshim). 3. Yevamot 21a. 4. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.1 pp. 254-5.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM

LOVE YOUR FELLOW

Vicky was the smartest in her class, and she knew it. As she walked into her classroom with her head held high, she couldn't help but smooth out the pile of papers in her left arm. It was right before her math test, and as she gave another cursory look at her papers, she just knew she would ace the test – no big deal.

She slid smoothly into her seat, and sat poised, with a pencil grasped in her right hand. Her back was tense, but her mind was alert – Vicky was not going to allow herself to make even one tiny mistake.

As she sat, waiting for the teacher to come, Vicky noticed Leah slowly and hesitantly making her way towards her desk. Why was she approaching her just before the test? Didn't Leah realize that Vicky needed to remain focused, preserving her concentration abilities? Who had time for idle chatter?

"Umm...Vicky?" Leah seemed unsure of herself. "Can you just explain this one problem to me quickly?" Vicky looked down at the sheet of paper that Leah was holding. "Not now! I have to be ready to take the test!"

Disappointed, Leah just stood there. Then a few moments later Mr. Benson walked into the classroom with a stack of tests. He looked around the class, and Leah quickly made her way back to her own seat. Then Mr Benson gave out the test sheets to each girl.

Forty five minutes later, when Vicky approached the teacher's desk to hand in her test, Mr. Benson whispered quietly to her, "Please meet me outside the staff room during break."

When the bell rang, signalling the break, Vicky made her way to the entrance of the staff room, still unsure of why Mr. Benson wanted to speak to her. He was at the door waiting for her.

"Vicky this week's Sedra is double – we read two Torah portions, Acharei and Kedoshim. In the Sedra of Kedoshim, there is a very famous commandment written. Do you know what it is?"

Vicky leaned back against the wall of the corridor and smiled. "Sure - we learned all about it yesterday. 'Love your Fellow as Yourself'"

"Yes, quite right, Vicky. Is this an easy law to keep?"

"I think so. At least, I try to be nice to my friends – I even share my snacks with them!"

Mr. Benson looked serious. "What about helping someone who is asking your advice?"

Vicky looked down. She remembered the incident with Leah. Mr Benson must have noticed how she was standing disappointedly near Vicky's desk. He must have guessed what happened.

"I'm sorry, of course that is also important. Sometimes I feel too rushed and tense and don't think enough about other people."

"I understand, Vicky. You can go to break now."

Vicky walked down the corridor towards the playground, resolving to find Leah, and give her biggest 'Sorry!' she could ever manage.

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