

PARASHAT KEDOSHIM

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“Love your neighbor as yourself” – one of the most famous *pesukim* of the Torah is found in this week’s parasha. It is a part of a list of many *mitzvot* with a less than obvious structure, leading our commentators to wonder about unifying themes and organization. Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman (cited by Nechama Leibowitz in her *gilyonot*) sees a thematic connection in each group of five *mitzvot*. In the case of our *mitzva* - “*v’ahavta l’reakha kamokha*”, it is the last of the series of five.



The series begins with a similar idea, stated in the negative – “Do not hate your brother in your heart”. Seen as the beginning and end of a group, the message is: don’t hate, but rather you should love. Rav Hoffman understands these as commanding the actions that come as a result of these mindsets, forbidding hateful actions and commanding loving actions. The three *mitzvot* in the middle are direct consequences of these mindsets. Instead of holding on to hatred against someone, you should rebuke the person, communicate why you are upset. You may not take revenge or keep a grudge.

These *mitzvot* make common sense, and yet are a lot more easily said than done. Human relationships are complicated. The Torah sets out ideals for us, for our behavior, with lots of supporting details as to how to accomplish these ideals. We are expected to spend our lives striving to grow and improve in terms of how we treat others.

The message of the center book of our Torah, *Sefer Vayikra*, is that we are meant to live lives of *kedusha*, of holiness. This holiness involves Temple service as is detailed in the beginning of the book, but the book continues with the charge of this week’s parasha: “*kedoshim tehiyu*” -- you must be holy. The Torah clarifies that what we mean by holiness is not something that takes us away from society and human interactions, but rather is lived in the context of our relationships with others.