

# KEDOSHIM THE WEAKNESS OF PLAYING TO ONE'S STRENGTHS

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**When** growing up, children are often taught to seek out their strengths and play to them. Within any given team, each member is assigned a specific role that taps into the unique strengths that they bring to the table. In that manner, the team as a whole achieves a sense of balance. Each member complements the others and compensates for the weaknesses of others, and ideally this creates a situation where each individual's skills are utilised optimally.

**When** in a group context - a sports team, a classroom, a department at work or a community - it is natural and widely accepted that each person brings their own unique set of skills and has their weaknesses balanced out by the other team or community members. When it comes to our internal personal skill set however, **is it enough for our internal strengths to compensate for our personal weaknesses?**

Can we simply accept the status quo? After all, these were the 'ingredients' with which we were created. Or, should there instead be a path of introspection and personal growth aimed at rectifying our weaknesses? Should we be embarking on an internal battle with the aim of refining ourselves and achieving a more complete state of being?

**At** the outset of *Parashat Kedoshim*, we are instructed that: 'Each man shall revere his mother and father.'<sup>1</sup> The Talmud highlights the fact that the mother is placed before the father because our automatic inclination, when it comes to reverence and fear, is traditionally towards the father, while the maternal connection naturally leans towards a more loving relationship.<sup>2</sup> In the Ten Commandments, however, we are commanded: 'Respect your father and your mother.'<sup>3</sup> In this case, the father is placed before the mother, for

**our natural inclination is to respect and feel devotion towards our mothers, due to the tender affection, or 'motherly love', that they customarily show. Fathers, in contrast, stereotypically command more of a sense of awe.** The message here is simple. Whilst we may feel a default sentiment towards each parent, we are commanded to overcome the default, to balance our proclivity and to honour and fear them both equally.

**Perhaps** in the individual realm too, we should be working towards overcoming the default set of character traits we were born with. It is true that each person possesses unique talents that point them towards fulfilling their specific mission here on earth. However, we should not fall prey to simply accepting our apparently 'natural state'. Indeed, we may have been born within a certain context or possess particular tendencies that incline

us towards one type of behaviour or another, but we must not allow these to define our destiny. As stated by the Rambam:

**Do not allow yourself to consider that which fools of other nations say, that at the time of a man's creation, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, decrees whether he will be righteous or wicked. This is untrue. Each person is capable of being righteous like Moses our teacher, or wicked like Jeroboam. Similarly, he may be wise or foolish, merciful or cruel, miserly or generous, or acquire any other character trait. There is no one who compels him, sentences him or leads him towards either of these two paths. Rather, he, on his own initiative and free will, chooses the path that he will follow.**<sup>4</sup>

**This** is a key distinction between a team and an individual. With teams, whether in family, business or sport, each individual complements and compensates for the rest of the group. One member's strengths accommodate for another's weaknesses and vice versa, which can lead to the whole really becoming greater than the sum of its parts. In the individual realm, however, it is different, 'If I am not for myself, who is for me?'<sup>5</sup> As individuals, we must seek out avenues for compensating for our flaws in order to achieve a sense of balance. Traits like anger or pessimism need to be actively worked on in order to even out the flaws and improve our one-man team.

שבת שלום



**Through** the subtle placement of the words 'mother' and 'father' in the context of honouring and revering one's parents, the Torah alludes to the fact that accepting the status quo is not enough. Rather, **we must always strive to find comfort specifically outside of our comfort zone, to transform our weaknesses into strengths and our seemingly fixed fate into a transcendental destiny.**

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Leviticus* 19:3.

<sup>2</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Kiddushin* 30b-31a.

<sup>3</sup> *Deuteronomy* 5:16.

<sup>4</sup> Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance, 5:2.

<sup>5</sup> Mishna, Tractate *Avot* 1:14.

In honour of a speedy and complete recovery for our precious daughter

**Lital Gila bat Renana Yael**

מוקדש לרפואתה השלמה  
המהירה של ביתנו היקרה  
**ליטל גילה בת רננה יעל**

#### Parasha Fact:

Nachmanides says that people can tick the box of a mitzvah but miss the point, for example, eating kosher food like a pig - the command to 'be holy' is to protect us from these potential pitfalls.

#### Next week in Emor:

*At some point in our lives, it is likely that we will find ourselves in a position of authority, whether in the community, family or professional context. With this authority often comes respect and esteem from others. It is easy to become arrogant and let the authority go to one's head. A subtle nuance in the Torah's command to the priests that they should be 'holy to God' offers us a blueprint for how to counter this mindset and carry our authority with humility.*