

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parshios Acharei–Kedoshim

“AND IF A MAN MAY LIE WITH AN ANIMAL, HE SHALL DIE, AND YOU SHALL KILL THE ANIMAL.” (VAYIKRA 20:15)

**It is necessary to remove the memory of the sin**

IF A MAN COMMITS the sin of bestiality, the Torah demands that he be put to death. In addition, the animal involved in the sin is also killed. Differing with Rashi, the Ralbag (ibid.) offers two reasons as to why the animal must be killed. The Ralbag’s first explanation: It is necessary to remove the memory of the sin from the public’s mind. Seeing the animal makes it more difficult for observers to believe in the efficacy of *teshuva*. When the perpetrator does *teshuva* and is stoned to death, his soul receives atonement for his sin. If the animal is killed, there is no longer any object to trigger memories of this misdeed, and people can more readily accept the idea that the sinner has received atonement. The Ralbag’s second explanation: People will be less likely to contemplate committing this terrible act themselves, if there is no tangible reminder of the event.

The first explanation seems difficult to understand: If the sinner willingly accepted his capital punishment, admitted his misdeeds and did *teshuva*, why would we have difficulty understanding that he can receive atonement? True, he committed a despicable offense, but he accepted the most severe consequence, the most painful form of death possible – why would we find it so hard to imagine that this terrible suffering, combined with sincere *teshuva*, will serve as atonement for the sin? Furthermore, if the sin is so great that the observers could not even imagine an opportunity for atonement, why are we concerned that people would even entertain thoughts of committing that same sin?

**The human being is described by our sages as an “entire world”**

The human being is described by our sages as an “entire world” (Sanhedrin Chap. 4, Mishna 5). This is not only a reference to the significance of man: it can also be understood to refer to the astonishing breadth of human emotion and thought. This incredible human psyche can even encompass diametrically opposed attitudes and outright contradictions. On one hand, we have the amazing spiritual sensitivity to appreciate the severity of a sin. We can understand Hashem’s awesome majesty and holiness, and be acutely aware of the horror and catastrophe inherent in a transgression of His will. It is clear to us that *teshuva* and atonement really don’t make sense for such an offense. Only because of Hashem’s great love for us does He accept our *teshuva* for such sins. On the other hand, we can still be tempted by the very same sin that we viewed as so overwhelmingly evil just a few moments before. This is the greatness, and at the same time, the vulnerability and frailty of the human personality.

**Even at moments of great spiritual growth and holiness, we remain human beings**

Reb Yisrael Salanter used to say, “Even when davening *shmoneh esrei* on Yom Kippur, one must be careful not to be provoked by someone pulling straw from under his feet.” On the holiest day of the year, while engaged in *teshuva* and confession for our sins, we must be vigilant that we don’t fall into the trap of getting upset at small, trivial matters. Even at moments of great spiritual growth and holiness, we remain human beings with human weaknesses. We have such wealth of potential within us, that we can reach breathtaking heights of fear of heaven and awareness of sin. At the same time, we must never be complacent, and must remain always on the lookout, that we don’t fall prey to the most revolting and abominable sins. May we merit Heavenly assistance as we climb this narrow path towards our ultimate goal of spiritual perfection.