



Torah Reflections on *Parashat Aharei Mot-Kedoshim*
(Leviticus 16:1 - 20:27)

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“You shall not curse the deaf... You shall not bear a grudge against your kinfolk.”
(Leviticus 19:14-18)

The 19th chapter in the book of Leviticus is sometimes called the “Holiness Code”, because it lays out a series of instructions for us to live lives filled with sanctity and blessing. Included in this listing is the prohibition of cursing the deaf.

One might argue that we shouldn’t curse anyone—so why should the Torah single out people who are hearing impaired?

Indeed, one classical answer is to interpret: one should not curse another person—even the person who does not hear your curse. This teaches us to rein in any desire we might have to speak ill or wish ill toward others, even if they are not present—even if they may never receive a report of what we say.

A question to ponder: how can cursing someone who can’t hear have a negative effect? On that person? On others who hear the curse? On the one who utters the curse?

Most of the *mitzvot* (religious instructions) given in the Torah are expressed in actions: speaking in ways that heal rather than hurt; returning lost items to their rightful owners; visiting the sick; supporting the financially downtrodden, etc. The “Holiness Code” also includes several *mitzvot* that are harder to measure, as they refer to our inner thoughts and feelings. One of those is the *mitzvah* to not bear a grudge toward others.

As with cursing the deaf, we can ask ourselves what damage is done when someone holds a grudge toward another member of their family or community? Does it make a difference if the grudge is not voiced—not heard by anyone else? Can a grudge truly be kept secret? Can we hold a grudge without somehow having that affect our relationships—without ever wishing ill will, misfortune, or vengeance upon the object of our grudge?

Both of these *mitzvot* address speech and thought that may be hidden in some way, but which still have important impacts on our lives and the lives of those around us. As we reflect on the powerful, subtle effects that grudges and curses may have, we may also recognize the opportunities on the other side of the coin. Taking a cue

from the psalmist: May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts serve to bring more holiness into our world.

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