

WHAT MAKES US HOLY

by Rabbi Label Lam

If a matter eludes you in judgment, between blood and blood, between judgment and judgment, or between lesion and lesion, words of dispute in your cities, then you shall rise and go up to the place HASHEM your G-d chooses. And you shall come to the Kohanim, the Leviim, and to the judge who will be in those days, and you shall inquire, and they will tell you the words of judgment. And you shall do according to the word they tell you, from the place HASHEM will choose, and you shall observe to do according to all they instruct you. According to the law they instruct you and according to the judgment they say to you, you shall do; you shall not divert from the word they tell you, either right or left. (Devarim 17:8-11)

and to the judge who will be in those days: Although this judge may not be [of the same stature] as other judges who preceded him, you must listen to him, for you have only the judge [who lives] in your time. — [Rashi]

It's a big wonder. In many instances we make a blessing before the performance of a Mitzvoh reciting the words, "...Who has sanctified us with His Mitzvos, and commanded us to..." That would be all and well if we were only talking about Torah Commandments. However, in many instance this is the same intro to a Brocho, for example on lighting Chanukah Candles or Shabbos Candles, or washing our hands. The big wonder is that those who would otherwise dispute or belittle the Oral Torah find themselves making that very declaration, "and commanded us" when they light candle on Chanukah. Where were we commanded in the Written Torah to light Chanukah Candles or to wash our hands before eating bread? Who says?

We are asked are mandated by the verses above to follow the sages and not to depart from whatever they tell you. This is the source in the Torah lending power and credence to Rabbinical authority.

It was the sages who instituted Takanas and Gezeiros. Takanas are the equivalent of positive or the "do"- active Mitzvos, like lighting Shabbos Candles. Gezeiros align with what's called the negative or "don't do"- refraining Mitzvos, like Mukzah on Shabbos. It was Rabbinical Law that took the proverbial hammer out of our hands on Shabbos. Therefore, every Rabbinical Law is really, in fact, a Torah Commandment. We are commanded by the Written Torah to be obedient to the directives of the Rabbis. How is it then that they are allowed to add or subtract from the Torah? Didn't Adam create a great problem himself by telling Chava not to touch the tree when the caution was only with regard

to eating?!

Let us go to Paris and visit the Louvre. There you will find some the most prized and priceless painting in the world. As we approach, for example the Mona Lisa, we begin to realize that she is placed out of reach. Her value is so high that a thick glass veil has been placed before her and electric beams signals when someone has encroached on her space. However, when you stand at the proper distance you can enjoy the authentic article as the artist, Leonard De Vinci had intended. The heavy glass is there to protect the integrity of the original painting. The electronic beams establish protective boundaries. It's all there, not to add to or alter the artist's intention, but to preserve it.

So it is with the Mitzvos generated by the Rabbinical authority. Also, when Adam told Chava not to touch the tree, he did not tell her that it was additional boundary. It was that misunderstanding that opened the door to a tragic error. Therefore since either right or left,: Even if this judge tells you that right is left, and that left is right. How much more so, if he tells you that right is right, and left is left!- [Sifrei]they are established by sages whose primary concern was preserving the integrity of the Torah, they are therefore an extension of Mitzvos. It makes perfect sense then that we say, "Who has sanctified us with His Mitzvos, and commanded us..." This is **what makes us holy**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.