

YOUR CREATIVE ENERGIES

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying, "Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, "You shall Be Holy, for Holy am I, HASHEM, your G-d."" (Vayikra 19:1)

"Be Holy" is a general admonition. Why is it not a specific Commandment? What is being asked of us! How Holy? Why Holy? What is Holy? The imagination runs wild as pictures of Holiness arise in the mind's eye and we wonder if Holy is attainable by ordinary folk like ourselves. The portrait of Holy probably includes some detached individual who has transcended the common noise of this world. He sits on his lofty perch or a mountain top gazing beyond the banality of banalities.

That's all very nice but when we speak about Holy in Hebrew terms, the definition suddenly shifts. Kedusha- which is Holy is the root of the technical term for marriage- Kedushin. When I say Kiddush, what do you immediately conjure up? Schnapps, seven layer cake, herring, and the list goes on. Kiddushin should have meant celibacy and Kiddush should translate into a fast day, if our original assumption was true! What then is Holy? I would like to offer a simple working definition.

When a man marries a woman according to Jewish Law he delivers and agrees to the conditions specified in the Kesuba. His pledge includes the basics of a human relationship, including emotional and physical support. Without getting into too many details, that's it! That is the baseline, the foundation of the marriage. The Kesuba does not speak of the thousands of opportunities to demonstrate and build love between the couple. The Kesuba is the floor. Love, surprisingly, is not part of the Kesuba but rather a goal to aspire towards with real actions. It is a ladder reaching to Heavens!

If a husband asks his wife for a cup of coffee, there are many ways a coffee can be delivered. She can put black instant coffee in a Styrofoam cup and tell him, "The milk is in the fridge!"- Thereby fulfilling his basic wish. He got his cup of coffee. However, she could put freshly brewed coffee in a clean porcelain cup with a decorative saucer underneath.

She can fan out a couple of biscuits too. A napkin would be nice and if it was folded that would add even more. There are millions of non-required ways a person can demonstrate love. It's good they are not demanded or expected. It would allow no room for the giver to express his or her self. The relationship would be overly taxed and the good feelings would be stifled. Rather it needs space and trust for creative expressions of love to flourish. There is a risk here as well. Maybe the husband and wife will be complacent and think that in the fulfilling of the Kesuba the relationship is complete.

Enters the marriage counselor and he says, "Love- Cleave! Become One!" That means there is much more- endless opportunity for more!

So too the Torah prescribes 613 Mitzvos. This is the Kesuba! This is the baseline of our relationship with HASHEM. It's a big job! If one takes care of the daily minimal requirements though, is that all there is!? I was commanded to make Kiddush on Shabbos with Challah. How delicious do the Challas have to be? How fluffy and beautiful? How ornate must the table be? How melodic and sincere the singing?!

Is anyone's Shabbos table exactly like anyone else's? Is anyone's Pesach Seder exactly like any other family? Is it the same from week to week or year to year? There are millions of creative opportunities for each of us with the same basic requirements to give expression to our overpowering love for HASHEM in original ways. That's holy!

The Mishe is Pirke Avos states, "No one is as free as one who is busy with Torah!" One might think just the opposite. No one is as burdened as someone who is encumbered by Torah and Mitzvos- Heaven forbid. I like to ask, "How much different types of music can one play on a piano with 88 keys?" I do believe the answer is that there is almost limitless. The same song can be played with differing emphasis in endless ways. Then how much more music can one create if there are 613 keys?! Kedoshim says, pleads, and shouts to the Jew, "Make some real music! Sing! Deepen that relationship of all relationships employing all of **your creative energies!**"