

WHERE HEAVEN MEETS EARTH

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

Purim is an intensely spiritual twenty-four hours, occupying a higher spiritual realm than even Yom Kippur. The elevated frame of mind that is meant to accompany this holy day is unparalleled in the Jewish calendar.

The challenge of embracing the spiritual while satisfying the physical is a reflection of the delicate tightrope we are expected to walk throughout our lives—finding a harmonious balance between body and soul.

This is one of the major themes of this week's Torah portion.

The first half of the Parsha describes the inauguration of the mishkan in which Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon, meet an untimely, tragic end. In their great zeal to serve their Creator, they rushed into the Temple with an offering which they were not commanded to bring—an act that invoked immediate Divine retribution.

The second major theme of this week's portion revolves around the various foods that are prohibited. The Torah calls the ingestion of crawling, creeping insects an abomination that defiles the body and forms a barrier between the soul and its heavenly source.

The juxtaposition of these two themes tells us much about our mission in life. We are not to live an ascetic life, denying basic human needs to enable the soul to transcend the body. Nor are we to indulge the body in its every physical whim. Instead, we are taught to achieve a singular marriage of body and soul that has the power to forge a wholesome relationship with our Divine Source.

All of this is summed up in the last verse of the Torah portion in which Hashem instructs us to create a havdala, separation, between the pure and the impure, between what we are permitted to eat and what we are not.

The great Torah sage, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, was once asked his impression of American Jewry after his visit to the United States. In his incisive style he responded, "Here, they know how to make kiddush but they do not know how to make havdala."

Yes, we are quick to embrace that which is sanctified, yet we are not as ready to abstain from that which is profane. To make the division between right and wrong, pure and impure, is indeed one of the greatest challenges of our time.

The current worship of "moral equivalence" and humanistic values that try to erase the distinctions

between moral and immoral, holy and profane, clears the way for all kinds of degenerate behavior. These hollow rationalizations cannot stand the test of time.

The litmus of one's true humanity is the ability to create the wholesome marriage of body and soul where one first makes "havdala," differentiating between that which is illusory and transitory and that which is real, solid and eternal. Only then, will we be capable of making Kiddush and becoming a truly holy people.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos

Sincerely

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