SPEAK TO THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

This shiur is dedicated to the memory of the thousands of brave soldiers of Tzahal and the underground who gave their lives for the creation and protection of Medinat Yisra'el, for the Sanctity of God's Name, the Nation and the Land. May their memories always be a shining inspiration for us as we move from the solemnity of Yom haZikkaron to the celebration and Hallel of Yom ha'Atzma'ut.

KOL ADAT B'NEI YISRA'EL

Our Parashah is introduced with the fairly uncommon mention of *Kol Adat B'nei Yisra'el* - (the entire congregation of the B'nei Yisra'el); there are only two previous times when Mosheh gave commands directly to the whole nation: Regarding the Korban Pesach (Sh'mot 12:3) and regarding the construction of the Mishkan (Sh'mot 35:1,4). In those two cases, the direct participation of every individual is obviously needed: Everyone had to donate to the construction of the Mishkan and everyone had to personally participate in the Korban Pesach. In the case of Parashat Kedoshim, we are faced with an anomaly: A list of laws, not unlike many Mitzvot given earlier, which are to be pronounced in front of the entire congregation. Why was Parashat Kedoshim said *b'Hakhel* (with the whole congregation assembled)? (see Torat Kohanim [cited in Rashi] at the beginning of our Parashah).

A second question arises from the formulation of the first "command" in our Parashah:

Kedoshim Tihyu, Ki Kadosh Ani Hashem Eloheikhem
Be holy, for I, Hashem your God, am Holy.

What is the Torah commanding us here? We are accustomed to Mitzvot which direct us in a specific way - either to action (e.g. eating Matzot, taking a Lulav) or to avoiding an action (e.g. stealing, murder). The command to "be holy" is unspecified and gives us no clue as to how we are to fulfill it.

There are two ways to approach this problem. We could either view the statement as independent - in which case our questions stands and we need to identify the specific parameters and goals of this Mitzvah. Alternatively, we could view this statement as general, either explicated in later verses or itself an additional perspective on earlier verses.

II

KEDOSHIM TIHYU AS AN INDEPENDENT MITZVAH

RAMBAM'S VIEW

Ramban and Rambam, in different ways, understand this Mitzvah to be independent. Rambam, in his fourth introductory paragraph to the Sefer haMitzvot (Shoresh #4), maintains that this statement is not to be reckoned as a Mitzvah (among the reckoning of 613 Mitzvot), since it is general in nature (what the Rambam calls a Mitzvah Kolelet.) Rambam equates the command to "be holy" with commands such as "keep all of My Mitzvot" etc.

RAMBAN'S VIEW

Ramban, in a very different style, assumes an independent stand to this command:

Abstain from the forbidden sexual relationships [mentioned in the preceding section] and from [other] sin, because wherever you find [in the Torah] a warning to guard against immorality, you find the mention of 'holiness'". This is Rashi's language.

[note: we can see from Rashi's comments that he does not view *Kedoshim Tih'yu* as purely independent, rather it underscores the sexual prohibitions presented in the previous chapter. As is clear immediately, Ramban differs on this critical point.]

But in the Torat Kohanim, I have seen it mentioned without any qualification [i.e. without any particular reference to immorality, as Rashi expressed it], saying: "Be self-restraining." Similarly, the Rabbis taught there: "And you shall sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am Holy. Just as I am Holy, so be you holy. Just as I am Pure, so be you pure." And in my opinion, this abstinence does not refer only to restraint from acts of immorality, as the Rabbi [Rashi] wrote, but it is rather the self-control mentioned throughout the Talmud, which confers upon those who practice it the name of P'rushim, [literally: "those who are separated" from self-indulgence, as will be explained, or those who practice self-restraint]. The meaning thereof is as follows: The Torah has admonished us against immorality and forbidden foods, but permitted sexual intercourse between man and his wife, and the eating of [certain] meat and wine. If so, a man of desire could consider this to be a permission to be passionately addicted to sexual intercourse with his wife or many wives, and be among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh , and speak freely all profanities, since this prohibition has not been [expressly] mentioned in the Torah, and thus he will become a *Naval biR'shut haTorah* (sordid person within the permissible realm of the Torah)! Therefore, after having listed the matters which He prohibited altogether, Scripture followed them up by a general command that we practice moderation even in matters which are permitted, [such as in the following]: One should minimize sexual intercourse, similar to that which the Rabbis have said: "So that the disciples of the Sages should not be found together with their wives as often as the hens," and he should not engage in it except as required in fulfillment of the commandment thereof. He should also sanctify himself [to self-restraint] by using wine in small amounts, just as Scripture calls a Nazirite "holy" [for abstaining from wine and strong drink], and he should remember the evils which the Torah mentioned as following from [drinking wine] in the cases of Noach and Lot. Similarly, he should keep himself away from impurity [in his ordinary daily activity], even though we have not been admonished against it in

the Torah. Likewise, he should guard his mouth and tongue from being defiled by excessive food and lewd talk, similar to what Scripture states, and every mouth speaks wantonness , and he should purify himself in this respect until he reaches the degree known as [complete] "self-restraint," as the Rabbis said concerning Rabbi Chiyya, that never in his life did he engage in unnecessary talk. It is with reference to these and similar matters that this general commandment [Kedoshim Tihyu] is concerned, after He had enumerated all individual deeds which are strictly forbidden, so that cleanliness of hands and body, are also included in this precept, just like the Rabbis have said: "And you shall sanctify yourselves : this refers to the washing of hands before meals. And be you holy : this refers to the washing of hands after meals [before the reciting of Birkat haMazon]. For I am Holy - this refers to the spiced oil" [with which they used to rub their hands after a meal.] For although these [washing and perfuming of hands] are commandments of Rabbinic origin, yet Scripture's main intention is to warn us of such matters, that we should be [physically] clean and [ritually] pure, and separated from the common people who soil themselves with luxuries and unseemly things. And such is the way of the Torah, that after it lists certain specific prohibitions, it includes them all in a general precept. Thus after warning with detailed laws regarding all business dealings between people, such as not to steal or rob or to wrong one another, and other similar prohibitions, He said in general: And you shall do that which is right and good: , thus including under a Mitzvat Aseh the duty of doing that which is right and of agreeing to a compromise [when not to do so would be inequitable]; as well as all requirements to act "beyond" the line of justice [i.e. to be generous in not insisting upon one's rights as defined by the strict letter of the law, but to agree to act "beyond" that line of the strict law] for the sake of pleasing one's fellowman, as I will explain when I reach there [that verse], with the will of haKadosh Barukh Hu. Similarly in the case of the Sabbath, He prohibited doing certain classes of work by means of a Mitzvat Lo Ta'aseh, and painstaking labors [not categorized as "work", such as transferring heavy loads in one's yard from one place to another, etc.] He included under a general Mitzvat Aseh, as it is said, but on the seventh day you shall rest. I will yet explain this, with God's help.

III

KEDOSHIM TIHYU AS THE TELOS OF MITZVOT

As noted above, Rashi maintains (unlike Rambam and Ramban) that Kedoshim Tihyu does not stand independently, rather it is a proper summary to the sexual prohibitions listed in the previous chapter (and, perhaps, a "distant introduction" to that same list in the following chapter). There are other Rishonim (notably S'forno) who maintain that Kedoshim Tihyu is the "topic sentence" for most, if not all of the Mitzvot in chapter 19. To wit, Kedoshim Tihyu is a general command - and the Mitzvot which follow direct us to behave in such a fashion as will insure our achieving this lofty status.

For purposes of this shiur, we will adopt this approach and attempt to understand the role of the various Mitzvot given (although, for brevity's sake, we will only discuss those Mitzvot mentioned in the first 19 verses of the chapter) within the scheme of Kedoshim Tihyu. Before going further, I'd like

to pose two questions on the wording of verse 2.

Besides our concern as to meaning (what does it mean to be *Kadosh*?), there is a grammatical sense here that bears inquiry. Many of the Mitzvot given to the B'nei Yisra'el are presented in the grammatically singular form - even though they are given to everyone as individuals. The clearest example of this is the Ten Statements (Sh'mot Ch. 20, D'varim Ch. 5 - see Ramban at the beginning of Sh'mot 20).

Even though these statements were given to the entire people, they were given in the singular (e.g. Zakhor as opposed to Zikhru). Why is the goal-statement of our Parashah, Kedoshim Tihyu, presented in the plural? The second half of the statement is much more troubling - *...Ki Kadosh Ani Hashem Eloheikhem* - "...for I, Hashem your God, am Holy". The transitional word *Ki*, usually translated as "because", seems to make no sense here. The statement is presented as a cause and effect - since God is Holy, the Congregation of Yisra'el should be holy. What is the reasoning here? How does the fact of God's sanctity imply ours? Another question presents itself once we start looking through the various Mitzvot in this Parashah. At the conclusion of many of the verses, the refrain *Ani YHVH* or *Ani Hashem Eloheikhem* is found as a concluding statement. What is the rhyme and reason of this "signature"? (This is a double question - what does it mean, and what is the logic behind its placement at particular junctures.)

Once we look at the Parashah in greater detail, two specific Mitzvot (or groups of Mitzvot) catch our eye as being somewhat incongruous with the theme of the Parashah. In vv. 5-8, after being (reminded) (commanded) regarding fearing our parents, observing Shabbat and avoiding idolatry - areas of Halakhah which we would all agree hold central places in our religious consciousness - the Torah elaborates the law of pigul, of the goodwill offering which is eaten after its due time (Halakhically translated into an offering regarding which the officiant intended it to be eaten later than its due time and had that intent while officiating). This would seem to be a relatively "minor" area of law, one which does not seem to fit the "grand" nature of the call to be holy and the areas of honor for parents, Shabbat observance and avoiding idolatry. What is the role of pigul in this scheme?

One final question: After the crescendo of interpersonal Mitzvot, climaxing in the credo of Jewish ethics: *v'Ahavta l'Re'akha Kamokhah* - (you shall love your fellow as yourself - v. 18), the Torah follows with a command to keep God's Hukim, specifically the laws of Kil'ayim (not mixing wool and linen in clothing, not mixing seeds and not cross- breeding animals). This seems like a big "letdown" after the glorious call to fellowship in the previous few verses. What is the logic behind the placement of this command/group of commands?

To summarize our questions:

1) Why was this Parashah to be said to the entire congregation?

2) Why is this command given in the plural?

3) What is the meaning of "Kedoshim Tihyu"?

4) What is the logic behind "...for I, Hashem your God, am holy"?

5) What is the meaning behind the refrain *Ani YHVH*?

6) What is the role of the law of pigul in our Parashah?

7) What is the logic behind the placement of *Hukot Kil'ayim*?

IV

FROM "GOY KADOSH" TO "KEDOSHIM TIHYU"

When we compare the last time that our entire people was addressed - at the foot of Mount Sinai - with this time, we note a striking similarity:

You shall be unto me a kingdom of Kohanim and a *Goy Kadosh* (holy nation). (Sh'mot 19:6).

In the same way, this address to the entire people begins with a charge to be holy; but, there's the rub. As opposed to Goy Kadosh - a directive to the nation as a singular political unit to manifest sanctity - in our case, the charge is directed to each individual - Kedoshim Tihyu. Why the switch?

When we chart the sequence of Mitzvot given to us until this point, we note that they follow a sequence designed to create a just and holy society - but are not, for the most part, addressed to the spiritual growth and sanctity of the individual. We can break the sequence into three sections:

A) *Sefer haB'rit* (Sh'mot 20-23):

Besides the Ten Statements (see our shiur on that topic, found at http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/sh/dt.57.2.5.html), nearly all of the Mitzvot given in this section are geared to creating and maintaining a just society. From the laws of murder, kidnapping and self-defense to the protection of the downtrodden and avoidance of judicial corruption, the Sefer haB'rit inheres the blueprint for a theistically-focused ethical society. (As implied, there are a few apparent exceptions to this rule; proper treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this shiur.)

B) The Mishkan (Sanctuary - Sh'mot 25-Vayyikra 10):

Once the society is just and safeguarded against corruption and oppression, it is ready to receive the Divine Presence. Keep in mind that the goal of the Mishkan was to enshrine God among the people, not in the tent itself (Sh'mot 25:8). Once the Mishkan was constructed, God commanded us regarding those methods via which the community and the individual might come closer (Korban) to Him. Although, as mentioned, this system was made available to individuals - both as expiation and to support the desire for a closeness to the Divine Presence - it was still within the realm of the communal sanctity of the Mishkan.

C) *Tum'ah* (Impurity - Vayyikra 11-18):

Interestingly, nearly all of these laws (Forbidden foods and their impact on ritual purity [Ch. 11]; childbirth [Ch. 12]; scale disease and its attendant rituals [Ch. 13 & 14]; sexual emissions [Ch. 15]; purification of the Mishkan from its impurities [Ch. 16]; prohibitions relating to "outside" slaughtering [Ch. 17]; prohibitions relating to sexual relations [Ch. 18]) are addressed to the individual. (The one exception is Ch. 16, the purification of the Mishkan.)

The reason for this can be explained by way of an analogy from the world of group dynamics. For example, when a group is singing together (e.g. at a Shabbaton), the entire group is considered to be singing, not one individual. To the extent that an individual is leading the group or deciding on the next song, he or she is doing so as a representative of the group, not as an individual. On the other hand, if even one person disrupts the singing (by talking, laughing, trying to sing something else etc.), that can totally defeat the group effort. In other words - a group effort is supported by the group but can be destroyed by one individual.

In much the same way, we credit the manifestation of God's Presence among the people to the group; nevertheless, one individual can destroy that experience and drive the Shekhinah away through one of the various behaviors which bring Tum'ah into the realm of the Divine. The third section - of Tum'ah - is indeed addressed to the individual, because he or she has the ability to destroy the national enterprise of Kedushah.

In any case, [nearly] all of the Mitzvot given to us until this point are geared to creating, enhancing and maintaining the national Kedushah as reflected by God's Presence among the people.

As we move into our Parashah, we note a clear shift in emphasis - the Torah is now addressing the individual and demanding a "higher" level of spirituality. It is no longer enough to be a member of a Goy Kadosh and not to disrupt that Kedushah; each individual is now called to his own spiritual growth - to finally achieve the ultimate in human heroism, which was the original Divine mandate for humanity:

And God said: Let us make Man in Our Image... and God created Man in His Image, in the Image of God He created him... (B'resheet 1:26-27).

Why then is this Divine charge given in the plural - *Kedoshim Tih'yu* - if it is addressed to the individual? The answer lies in understanding the basic tension of Jewish values. Unlike some Eastern worship-systems, we do not maintain that individual spiritual perfection is the sole goal of our existence. We live in this world and have practical obligations towards it. On the other, we do not maintain that we should negate our personae to the communal will and effort, ignoring our own talents, desires and ambitions.

As such, the enterprise of individual Kedushah can not be taken out of the realm of the community - and we must be addressed to grow as individuals within the context of interpersonal relationships as

well as internally. Therefore, the Torah addresses us as an entire nation - but, instead of a Holy Nation, we are now called to add "Nation of Holy Individuals" to our title.

V

VERSE 2 REVISITED

We can now answer our first two questions:

1) This Parashah to be said to the entire congregation because, unlike earlier Parashiot which were addressed to the national project of Kedushah - and thus could be communicated to the leaders first - this Parashah is addressed to the personal Kedushah-growth of each individual.

2) The command was given in the plural because it was addressed to the individuals as they behave both personally and socially.

KI KADOSH ANI

We can now also answer the next two questions:

3) *Kedoshim Tih'yu* means that we should finally realize and actualize the *Tzelem Elokim* (Image of God) in which we were all created. Doing so means imitating God (within the limits imposed by both the laws of physics [i.e. science] and the laws of morality [i.e. the Torah]).

4) This also explains the logic behind "for I, Hashem your God, am holy"; since we were created in His Image (whatever that may mean; that is a shiur in and of itself), we are now called to reflect that Image through our own behavior. [Alternatively, we could read the Ki as an extended *Kaf haDim'yon* (the letter Kaf as a prefix indicates similarity) - i.e. "be holy LIKE I, Hashem your God, am Holy."]

VI

THE "ANI YHVH" REFRAIN

In order to understand the constant refrain of *Ani YHVH* in our Parashah (note that it continues - more sporadically - through Ch. 22), we'll deviate for a moment to investigate the central text of Hallel: *Hodu lHashem Ki Tov, Ki l'Olam Has'do* ("give thanks to YHVH, for He is good, for His kindness endures forever" - T'hillim 118:1).

The second verse in that chapter is *Yomar Na Yisra'el, Ki l'Olam Has'do* - lit. "let Yisra'el say: for His kindness endures forever". This sentence is a bit awkward, as the *Ki* ("...for...") at the beginning of the second half of this verse seems to point nowhere; an idea cannot begin with the introduction of an effect, it must be preceded by a cause (e.g. "He is good"). In addition, our custom of responding to the leader is not to echo his line (*Yomar Na...*), rather to repeat the first line. Why do we do this? [These two questions are equally germane in reference to the next two verses.]

I would like to suggest that the second verse should be understood as follows: Yomar Na Yisra'el

[*Hodu lHashem Ki Tov*] *Ki l'Olam Has'do*.

In other words, the Psalmist is asking Yisra'el (and the House of Aharon and the God-fearers) to join in his praise which begins with Hodu.... Why then does the verse abbreviate this phrase? It is simply too long! Keep in mind that many of the T'hillim were composed to be recited by the Levi'im in antiphonal fashion in the Beit haMikdash - and, as such, meter was a significant consideration. The verse includes an ellipsis: *Yomar Na Yisra'el: "...Ki l'Olam Has'do"* - which explains our response and the awkward grammar.

The same approach can be utilized to explain the refrain of *Ani Hashem [Eloheikhem]* in our Parashah. The topic sentence of our Parashah is "Be holy, for I, Hashem your God, am Holy". The signature form *Ani YHVH* is an elliptical way of repeating the entire charge to God-like Kedushah. As an example, instead of reading *Ish Imo v'Aviv Tira'u v'et Shab'totai Tish'moru, Ani Hashem Eloheikhem* (Each man shall fear his mother and father; observe My Shabbatot, I am Hashem your God) (v. 3), read *Ish Imo v'Aviv Tira'u v'et Shab'totai Tish'moru, [Kedoshim Tih'yu, Ki Kadosh] Ani Hashem Eloheikhem* (Each man shall fear his mother and father; observe My Shabbatot, [be holy, for] I Hashem your God [am Holy]).

5) This answers our fifth question - the refrain of *Ani YHVH* is an abbreviated form of the topic sentence, marking each occurrence of this refrain as a demarcation of another dimension of Kedoshim Tih'yu. We can almost view the components of our Parashah as a list, each item concluding with a short form of the sentence which guides the entire section.

We can now examine the first several stages of our Parashah to better understand the call to individual Kedushah.

VII

FEARING PARENTS AND OBSERVING SHABBAT

Each man shall fear his parents, observe My Shabbatot, I am Hashem your God (v. 3)

Why are these two juxtaposed? In addition, the grammar of the first stich is uneven: It is first phrased in the singular (*Ish Imo v'Aviv* -"each man, his mother and father...") but ends in the plural (Tira'u - "you [plural] shall fear").

Rashi is sensitive to the first problem - and his answer will help us with the second. "Observe My Shabbatot": The text juxtaposed Sh'mirat Shabbat to fear of your father, to teach you that although I have warned you concerning fear of your father, if he tells you to desecrate Shabbat, do not heed him..."I am Hashem your God": you and your father are obligated to honor Me, therefore, do not heed him to violate My words."

This also explains the grammatical shift: God [through Mosheh] is addressing the entire nation, made up of many multi-generational families. Even though He is speaking to each individual son and daughter, even those parents have their own parents to respect and fear. That entire group has a

greater mission and loyalty to keep in mind - we are all bound to God's commands.

The import of this balance is to keep any particular object of our honor or fear from becoming an end in and of itself - and keeps us from creating an obsession around it. Even though we are commanded to fear our parents, that fear should not become so overwhelming that it keeps us from heeding God's commands.

This is, indeed, a reflection of God's Sanctity - the goal of the whole enterprise. Although we often associate sanctity with isolation (a Nazirite is considered Kadosh - see Bamidbar 6:5), God's Holiness is one of synthesis and balance. On the one hand, God is transcendent; yet God is also immanent. This same balance is the (very challenging) goal of Kedoshim Tih'yu. The balance between fear of parents and loyalty to God's commands is one dimension of this imitation of the Divine.

VIII

DO NOT TURN TO THE FALSE GODS

The next verse uses a new verb in its repetition of the warning against idolatry. *Al Tiph'nu* - "Do not turn away to the false gods...". The Torah uses this verb to again stress the need for balance; one of the prevalent features of pagan worship is fetishism, such that the entire focus of the individual is geared to this worship-object. Although the Torah abhors idolatry for its demeaning of the worshipper and the inherent silliness of the notion (see MT Avodah Zarah 11:16), it may also be warning us away from fetishism and obsessive behavior.

[Note that nearly all Mitzvot have maximum limits; perhaps this is a way of assuring that no Mitzvah would be turned into an end in and of itself].

IX

PIGUL

Armed with our understanding of *Ani YHVH* as a "marker", we can now explain the role of pigul here. Note that the refrain does not show up again until the end of v. 10 - so pigul is included in one "Kedoshim- Tih'yu dimension" with the laws of Pe'ah, Leket, Peret and 'Olelot (various gleanings left for the poor during harvest). Shadal (Sh'mu'el David Luzzato, 19th century Italian commentator) suggests that the reasoning behind the law of pigul is akin to the gleanings. If the Torah had allowed a goodwill offering (Korban Sh'lamim) to be eaten over an indefinite time period, the individual would likely eat some, with his family and close friends, during the first few days after bringing it. He would then store it away and continue to "celebrate" with his entourage. Keep in mind that a Sh'lamim is brought from the flock or the herd - a large animal which cannot be devoured quickly. Since the Torah commands that a Sh'lamim must be eaten on the day that it is offered and the morrow - no later than the end of that second night, the one bringing the offering will perforce share it with many others. The assumption is that not only will this offering have a portion for God (burnt on the altar), a portion for the Kohanim (see Vayyikra 7:34) and a portion for the Yisra'el who brought it (see Rashi on

Vayyikra 3:1) - it will also include the poor, since the one who brought it will have to share it around to make sure it is devoured on time.

This understanding of Pigul underscores another dimension of the balance and synthesis which is the desired type of Kedushah. Not only must both the "secular" and "holy" parts of our lives be informed by a desire to holiness - but those considerations must inform each other. Not only do we have to act compassionately and generously with the poor in our midst - we have to make that consideration a part and parcel of our Mikdash-experience.

This answers our sixth question - pigul is an integral piece of the Kedushah experience, as it ensures that we not "lose ourselves" in the sanctity of the Mikdash and forget our communal responsibilities.

X

VERSES 11-18: THE ETHICAL SOCIETY

As I mentioned in the shorter shiur sent out last week, these four groups of Mitzvot are geared towards elevating a society to the pinnacle of interpersonal sensitivity and empathy:

We start with the society which is rife with stealing - such that a person's word, even in court, is not to be trusted, where even God's Name is desecrated in the name of material gain. This is the society of "What's yours is mine and what's mine is mine" (Avot 5:10) - and verses 11 & 12 address this level of corruption and command us to move up from here.

Then - the society in which more subtle types of corruption exist - holding back pay, hurting people who won't find out that it's you - or won't even know about it. This is the society of "What's yours is mine and what's mine is yours" - without respect for boundaries. To this society, the Torah addresses verses 13 & 14.

We then look at a society which has moved up from these levels - but where there is still discrimination and favoritism in the system - and where idle gossip and "turning a blind eye" are the norm. "What's yours is yours and what's mine is mine" - i.e. mind your own business. To this society, the Torah addresses verses 15 & 16.

And then we move to build the ideal society: Once we have justice, revenge seems reasonable. And there seems to be no need for my letting you know that your behavior upsets me - or to be as concerned with your needs as I am with mine. We move from the just society to the holy society. All of the Mitzvot in these last two verses take us beyond justice - they move us towards compassion. Towards "What's mine is yours and what's yours is yours".

XI

HUKOT KIL'AYIM

Now, to our final question: Why does the Torah mention the prohibitions of cross-breeding, cross-

planting and "woolsy-linsy" immediately after the glorious crescendo of "Love your fellow as yourself"? These three prohibitions are introduced with the phrase *Et Hukotai Tish'moru* - "Keep my Hukot". Although conventional wisdom holds that a Hok is a "non-rational" law (see Rashi at the beginning of Parashat Hukat, 19:2), the simple meaning of the word is "immutable law". See, for instance, Yirmiyahu 33:25, where he refers to the Hukot of heaven and earth. In Hebrew, the laws of physics are called Hukim, whereas rules of grammar are called Mishpatim. When the Torah says that we must observe God's Hukot, it means that we have to uphold and support the laws which God etched into the universe. Why is this the case - and how can we do so?

Keep in mind that our original mandate was to be "in God's Image" and to have dominion over the earth. If we look at the description of creation in the first chapter of B'resheet, we notice that there is a stress on order and closed cycles of reproduction and regeneration. The day ends here, the night begins here; the heavenly waters and earthly waters are separated; the land ends here and the water begins here; each tree and plant regenerates l'Mineihu (according to its own kind) and so on.

Since we are charged with being God's "caretakers" of the earth, it follows that we must not only continue the process of creation and order (note that our Rabbis say that a judge who renders perfect judgment is considered a partner with God in creation), but we must also not attempt to subvert that order.

Ramban (Vayyikra 19:19) provides two reasons for this limitation. If we attempt to usurp God's order, the implication is that God's creation is insufficient and somehow imperfect. In addition, he notes, many forms of usurpation of the natural order impair the reproductive ability of that species (witness the mule).

After having guided us to the perfectly ethical and compassionate society, the Torah addresses the next concern. Since we have (we think) achieved *Kedoshim Tih'yu,* and fully reflect God's sanctity, we may parlay that relationship into a full partnership and deign to improve upon His design. The lesson of *Hukot Kil'ayim* is the limited nature of our partnership - we may endeavor to actualize our Godly Image, but we must never forget that it is a limited partnership. The parallel of *Kedoshim Tih'yu* with *Kadosh Ani* must never lead us to arrogantly forgetting our role in God's world. This lofty goal is only achieved when we not only maintain balance - but also perspective.

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