

MEGA-MITZVOS

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Mega-Mitzvos¹

The call to *kedushah* that opens our *parshah* is so powerful, that it could dwarf whatever follows. Abruptly, the Torah switches to the mitzvos of respecting parents and observing Shabbos? Did the Torah simply move on to the next topic, or can the two be related?

In fact, the mitzvos of *kibud av v'aim* and Shabbos are extraordinarily effective gateways towards fully and consistently living a life of *kedushah*. After instructing us to live lives of *kedushah*, the Torah immediately offers two efficient ways of how to get there.

The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* makes the connection to the first of them. Respecting parents is juxtaposed to *kedoshim tihiyu*, because one of its hidden powers is its ability to lead us to *kedushah*. Citing kabbalistic masters, he writes that a person can bring greater purity to his private thoughts - an important component of *kedushah* - by fixing the visage of his father and mother in his mind's eye.

We could easily extend his observation to Shabbos. *Reishis Chochmah* tells us that Shabbos is the root of and path to all *kedushah*. (Another way of looking at "G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it"² is that the blessing He gave to Shabbos is that *vayekadesh oso*, that Shabbos is a wellspring from which *kedushah* bountifully flows to the person who wishes to elevate himself.) A Jew who wishes to grow in *kedushah* should begin the process with Shabbos.

What gives potency to these two mitzvos in particular? Divrei Moshe of Rav Moshe (Shoham) of Dolina helps us along the way to understanding. It is well established to those versed in kabbalah, he notes, that every mitzvah we perform touches the source of that mitzvah in the Upper Worlds, and awakens a response from it. This response redounds, in part, to the one who performed the mitzvah, drawing supernal *kedushah* upon himself.

When we recite, as part of every *berachah* on mitvos, *asher kidshanu be-mitzvosav*, we refer to this idea. Aside from whatever particular spiritual goals are served by each individual commandment, every mitzvah brings with it a dividend of *kedushah*.

With this notion he explains why the gemara³ insists that it is a greater accomplishment to perform a mitzvah that one is commanded to perform than to perform without Divine instruction. The

distinction is clear and elegant. Only the person whose performance is commanded and mandated automatically draws from the mitzvah's source. The commandment and the one commanded are linked by design; *kedushah* flows between them on a path built into the system.

Many societies promote respect for parents. Non-Jews simply do not take away the same experience when they treat their parents well. While the behavior is admirable and positive, they are still not obligated and commanded in it. This means that they are not linked to the mitzvah in the same way as Jews are; they can take much from the behavior, but they will not draw from the *kedushah* at the source of the mitzvah.

We are but one step removed from understanding the special role that *kibud av v'aim* plays in facilitating *kedushah*. We know a bit about the spiritual source of this mitzvah. *Mekubalim* also speak of an *Abba* and *Ima*, referring to the *sefiros* of *Chochmah* and *Binah*. The *Divrei Moshe* goes on to explain that the practice of *kibud av v'aim* draws from these two of the loftiest *sefiros*. (Because *Daas* combines the two others, *kibud av v'aim* in effect draws from the upper triad of *sefiros* of *Chochmah*, *Binah*, and *Da'as*.)⁴ Moreover, all other *sefiros* are touched in the process, since *Chochmah* is the ultimate source for all the *sefiros* of *chesed*, while those of *gevurah* all proceed from *Binah*. (Many of us are more familiar with the way that *Chochmah* and *Binah* ultimately play out in the arena of human behavior. Simply put, they translate into the two chief forms of inner emotional response and hence relating to Hashem: *ahavah* and *yirah* - serving Hashem through love and fear. Between the two, we cover all the affirmative obligations (i.e. *ahavah*) and proscriptions (i.e. *yirah*) of the Torah.

Without understanding more than a smidgeon of these deep concepts, we are still struck by a powerful image. When we practice *kibud av v'aim*, we stand at a portal to all the *kedushah* channels that HKBH structured in the system of mitzvos.

Kedoshim tihiyu is not just a command to obey those mitzvos of the 613 that are *kedushah*-oriented. It does not tell us how to act (or not to act), but what to be. We are exhorted to transform the totality of our lives and existence into *kedushah*. It is impossible to turn ourselves into *kedushah* without tools that globally access all the *kedushah* that is available. *Kibud av v'aim* does precisely that. We understand why it follows *kedoshim tihiyu*.

With the addition of one more element, we have the answer for which we have been looking. Shabbos acts similarly to *kibud av v'aim*; it, too, is a spiritual mega-mitzvah. *Reishis Chochmah* maintains that Shabbos spreads the light of the triad of upper *sefiros*. (This is why he argues, as cited above, that Shabbos is the practical root of all *kedushah*.) Between the demands of *zachor* and *shamor*, Shabbos addresses both the *ahavah* and *yirah* modes of Hashem's service. (Additionally, the bride of *Knesses Yisrael* is Shabbos itself. This introduces another powerful element of *ahavah* into our conception of Shabbos. Even the *yirah* component of Shabbos is a mixed bag. *Yesod HoAvodah* teaches that *ahavah* can lead to *yirah* - a *yirah* lest one's actions damage the ethereal purity of the *ahavah* relationship, and therefore endanger it.)

One observation threatens to topple our entire conceptual structure. If these two mitzvos are important precisely because they link to all of *kedushah*, then why does the Torah present only half of their fullness? *Kibud av v'aim* is actually not mentioned in our *parshah* - only its *yirah* counterpart. Similarly, the *ahavah* component of Shabbos is missing. Only *shamor* is represented; *zachor*, the affirmative aspects of Shabbos, is nowhere to be seen.

Upon further reflection, however, we should not be surprised. *Bais Avrohom* stresses that only *yirah* can stand up to the desires and lusts that churn within us. In our quest for *kedushah*, our major obstacle is not a shortage of inspiration or knowledge, but the resistance thrown up by our baser desires. It is not surprising in the least that when the Torah wishes to instruct us in the practical pursuit of *kedushah* that it would stress the most important facet of the two mega-mitzvos that can make it all happen.

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom, pgs. 90-92

² Bereishis 2:3

³ Kiddushin 31A

⁴ For a variety of reasons, Keser is seen as so lofty, remote and undifferentiated that it is often ignored in looking at the interconnection between the sefiros. Thus, when looking for the practical source of the observable universe, Chochmah, Binah and Da'as are taken as the uppermost sefiros.