

KIDDUSH MOMENTS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God told Moshe, "Speak to the entire congregation of the Children of Israel and tell them, 'Be holy, for I, your God, am holy.' " (Vayikra 19:1-2)

Two terms that seem not to go together are holy and war, though over the last millennium they have been paired countless times, and with gruesome results. It doesn't make a difference whether we are talking about a so-called Holy Crusade or Jihad, it's been the same thing with the same result.

The problem has not been a lack of understanding of the word war; that seems to come quite naturally to the those who have taken up the banner of a Crusade or Jihad. The problem, of course, is the terrible lack of understanding of the concept of holiness, or holiness, in Hebrew.

The starting point of understanding the concept of kedushah is the Ramban's question and answer on the second of this week's double parshah. The Ramban asks why it is that Parashas Kedoshim comes at this point in Sefer Vayikra, when it really ought to come at the beginning of the sefer and act as either the introduction to the entire book, or at the end of the entire sefer and as a summation of the entire book.

After all, everything before and after this week's parshah is all about living a holy life, making Parashas Kedoshim at this point rather redundant. But of course, since nothing in the Torah is redundant, it must come to teach something about kedushah that we did not surmise until now, especially the way the Torah acts as if it is introducing the concept in this week's parshah for the first time.

The Ramban answers the question with a new concept: a menuval b'reshus HaTorah, which translates basically as depraved with the permission of the Torah. However, the Torah is not coming to permit such behavior, explains the Ramban, but to curb it. One might think that he can eat like a glutton, as long as the food is kosher and it is not a fast day, says the Ramban, and that he can drink as if there is no tomorrow, as long as he imbibes kosher spirits. Says Parashas Kedoshim in the middle of Sefer Vayikra: Not if you value a relationship with God.

The Ramban explains that all of the parshios from Vayikra until the end of Acharei Mos were just to bring a Jew to the possibility of being kadosh—holy. First remove all that which is forbidden to you, the Torah says, because as long as you eat forbidden foods and engage in forbidden activities, kedushah won't even be on your radar. You will never be able to appreciate its importance to you or the world. You would simply drift down the river of empty living.

In other words, explains the Ramban, kedushah is not merely about how you deal with that which is forbidden to you. Any decent human being with any sense of integrity should be able to practice some self-control and avoid the bad stuff no matter how much he feels like jumping out of his skin to partake of it.

Rather, says the Ramban, kedushah is about how you behave with that which is permissible to you. It is about how you interact with the world that God has given you to enjoy, and what you do with it, and why. Even after commanding so many mitzvos regarding what is forbidden, the Torah still leaves plenty of room for a person to be a menuval with what is permissible, which reveals how a person relates to the mitzvos in general.

On the tzitz—diadem—of the Kohen Gadol were the words, Kodesh L'Hashem—Holy to God. Obviously, this was an ongoing reminder of the spiritual level on which the Kohen Gadol had to live his life. But, as the Leshem explains, it was also a reminder of the ongoing work of the Jewish people, to sanctify Creation and make everything holy to God.

However, isn't everything already holy to God, by virtue of the fact that it is part of God's world?
Yes.

Then, what is the role of the Jewish people if the world is already holy without them? It is to reveal the holiness of Creation, which ever since the sin of Adam HaRishon, went from being a reality to a potential. The main result of Adam's sin was the transformation of everything in Creation to the level of good and evil, making it man's choice which potential will ultimately become manifest.

Hence, it is the role of the Jew to make this clear to the rest of the world, and to inspire the world to act in the same manner, on whatever level they can. Then, as the whole world acts towards the physical world in a spiritual manner, the entire world ascends level by level, until it becomes holy to God, as will be the case in Yemos HaMoshiach and onward.

However, if this idea applies to anything at all in Creation, it is to man himself. There is no greater Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil today than man himself, meaning that he is capable of tremendous kedushah, or tremendous impurity. The world is has some very holy people in it, and some extremely unholy people in it, and billions of shades in-between. It's just a question of, how much good, and how much evil.

Ultimately, it is a question of what many call human dignity, and what the Torah calls derech eretz, which literally means "way of the land," but which usually means good manners—the Torah's idea of good manners. As Rashi points out (Bereishis 1:26), derech eretz is so important it even preceded the giving of Torah itself. Without derech eretz, Torah will not steer a person in the right direction, and he can become a menuval b'reshus HaTorah.

For example, people often come to the Shabbos table on Friday night hungry, especially in the summer time when the sun sets late ("Nu, Abba! Make Kiddush already! I'm starrrrrrving!"). There is a

tremendous drive inside to simply sit down and dig in, but instead, people take a silver cup in hand, and with tremendous intention and a sense of gratitude for all that God has done for them until that moment, and for the good that is hopefully coming up, make Kiddush.

For me, personally, Kiddush is the highlight of my week, no matter how hungry I am and how many kids are nagging to get on with it already. It is the antithesis of Amalek, who came to attack us with impurity, not physical weapons. In each generation, he uses distraction to draw us away from holiness, because he knows that the only way to interfere in the progress of redemption is to invalidate the Jewish people themselves. He does everything he can to draw our attention away from God and Godly things, so that we become ineligible for a relationship to God. To physically attack us, but leave us spiritually intact, is to lose the battle for Amalek. To spiritually attack us but leave us physically intact, so that we can pursue non-holy lives is total victory for Amalek.

Kiddush is a time to bring time to an almost stand-still. The room becomes quiet, because everyone has to have intention for every word as if he or she was making their own Kiddush. By now, my family knows how much making Kiddush means to me, and how much I try and invest in terms of intention and focus. There's a lot of Kabbalah behind Kiddush, and Friday night is a very mystical time.

The result is a tremendous sense of dignity. Standing there with a Kiddush cup in hand, thinking of God and all the good that He does for us, thinking of the awesomeness of His Creation, dressed smartly for Shabbos, as the Shabbos candles burn in the background and give off their holy light. The whole scene is so majestic, very dignified.

It's not always so easy to maintain that high level of kedushah the entire Shabbos, depending upon how tired everyone is, and the spiritual level of the guests. But, at least once a week, for a couple of moments, you can really feel what it means to Kodesh L'Hashem, and the peace and calm that comes with it as well.

Admittedly, being holy to God can have its violent moments. For example, when the Jewish people conquered Canaan, they were supposed to have wiped out the entire Canaanite nation, men, women, and children. They were not supposed to have shown any mercy, even though, in the end, they did, just like in the battle against Midian in the Torah, after they caused the Jewish people to go astray.

Then what's the difference? First of all, the war was commanded by God, and reluctantly carried out by the Jewish people. With all the other nations' holy wars, they were not commanded by God, and carried out enthusiastically by those enlisted to fight. Ever listen to the people who are being trained for Jihad suicide attacks, or their relatives who support them? Enthusiasm is not the word.

Secondly, taking a look at the leaders who ordered the Crusades, or those who today encourage Jihad, human dignity seems to be lacking. They are dogmatic to an extreme, and show no concern for any life other than their own. The similarities between the way that the Muftis preach Jihad to

their adherents and the way Hitler, y"l, preached world domination to his people, are striking. There is plenty of pride, but nary a hint of derech eretz or human dignity.

Hence, the Holy Roman Empire was far more figurative than actual. The slaughtering that took place in the name of one god or another was as humanly undignified as you can get. "Holy" and "Roman" went together about as well as "Holy" and "War" do today, and with the same results.

Is it a coincidence that the Jewish people rarely did something similar, and when they did, it was on command of God and they showed unwarranted mercy? Is it by chance that the concept of a crusade, such as those carried out for hundreds of years in the name of spreading Christianity, does not exist in the Jewish lexicon? Is it simply recklessness that makes Israelis defend themselves today while trying, at great risk to themselves, to not harm those who are not directly members of those perpetrating acts of war against the State of Israel. Yet, those who do wage war against us do so joyfully and indiscriminately, they murder soldier and non-soldier, men, women, and children?

Ironically, the detractors of the Jewish people, especially today, like to argue just the opposite. They call the Israelis the aggressors, and criticize them for barbaric acts of war against a harmless and innocent people. Not only do they not feel bad about perpetrating such a lie, they actually feel good about themselves by taking it up and fighting for it. How undignified can you get?

Then again, many of these people would have no problem cheating on tax returns, or would call what the Torah calls extreme acts of indecency art because it happens to be in a Hollywood movie. The societies from which these people tend to come have stripped away much of human dignity, catering to base instincts rather than the Godly side of man. No wonder they can side with the wrong underdog.

In fact, when one ponders the spiritual level of Western society, and considers a term that best sums up that level, "holy" is not a term that comes to mind. In fact, nothing will break up a part faster than, "Hey, let's do something holy now . . ."

Unfortunately, today, after living in exile for so long, many of these values spilled over into the Jewish world as well. Eighty percent assimilation is catastrophic, and one thing about assimilated Jews: they can go to even greater extremes than their host nations. They can act just as undignified, if not more, than the nations around them.

Even the Torah world has absorbed some unholy life patterns into what is supposed to be a holy lifestyle. Some things from the material world can be used in a holy manner, and made holy to God through usage. However, sometimes religious Jews like to believe that is the case, when in fact what is really happening is that they are comprising on holiness, and descending to the less holy level of that which is spiritually entrapping them.

At the root of it all is not a desire to be religious, but a desire for the truth and a tremendous sense of self-honesty. Nothing can be more important to instill within children than these two qualities, which

is hard to do if the parents do not act the same way. Kids are straight-shooters; they can sense inconsistency better than parents can fake it.

When the truth is the greatest asset in a person's life, and they have the intellectual and emotional capacity to pursue it and accept it when they find, and reject all the placebos along the way, a person will naturally have self-dignity. And, a person with self-dignity will automatically afford the same rights to others, except when the others are clearly evil. The Muftis, and many in the church, allied themselves with Hitler, y"s, during World War II, and many still do.

This, of course, will result in derech eretz, not just towards other people, but towards everything with which a person will come into contact. The clothing such a person buys, the electronic gadgets in which he invests, and for how much, and certainly how he uses them, will all be scrutinized by his self-dignity meter. It will, or should tell him, when enough is enough, or too much.

Admittedly, developing such a lifestyle is a life-long project with plenty of ups-and-downs, especially in today's extremely distracting world. It is world that is run by Amalek from behind the scenes, who says he sells success and popularity, but which is does at the cost of human dignity and Godly holiness. Billions fall for his sales pitch every moment of the day, every moment of the week. While they gleefully leave the stores, he laughs all the way to spiritual bank of indignity.

That's why Shabbos is so important, and Kiddush is so important to me. As I stand there, with cup and wine in hand, and focus intently on the words, I get to see myself in a whole new light, a light that does not shine as brightly during the week as it does at that climactic moment. I am reminded once again of in Whose image I was created, and how living up to that image is what life is all about, and my ticket to the World-to-Come. It is very, very sobering.

The day is coming when the reality of Kiddush will be everyday, once Moshiach comes and initiates the process of restoring the world to its former glory, as it was prior to the first sin of man. Who will be here to celebrate that joyous and wondrous moment, which may be a lot closer than we think? Only those who make some kind of effort to create such moments on their own, in the world they have been blessed to live and which they have been assigned to make holy.

Text

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