

THE KEDUSHA INFOMERCIAL

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The underlying theme of Sefer Vayikra is a presentation of an ideal life of Kedusha - sanctity. The setting of the Kohain in the Bais Hamikdash is the model that the Torah chose to describe this utopian life of materialism in the service of spirituality. The two Parshios, last week's Acharei Mos and this week's Kedoshim, continue this theme, but they extend the examples of sanctity beyond the realm of the priesthood and temple service. Most of the Mitzvos in this week's reading introduce sanctity into the daily lives of the nation.

Last week's Parsha, Acharei Mos, is divided between a description of the Yom Kippur service and the fifteen prohibited sexual relationships. This week's Parsha Parsha, Kedoshim, introduces a variety of applications for the integration of sanctity into our daily lives. The following is only a partial list: The honoring of parents; charity; paying a workers wages on time; concern for the spirituality and physical well being of others; not placing a stumbling block in front of the morally blind; judging fairly; not to gossip; giving proper criticism; not standing idly by when someone else is in danger; not to harbor resentment; to love your neighbor; and not to bear a grudge or take revenge.

Additionally, there are a number of laws dealing with speciation and separation: Do not crossbreed livestock. Do not crossbreed different species of seeds. Do not wear Shatnez - a mixture of wool and linen.

In the second half of Kedoshim the seemingly eclectic examples of how sanctity is applied are continued. It is interesting to note that the Torah saw fit to prohibit consulting with mediums or oracles three separate times: 19:31 - 20:6 - 20:27.

Why does the Torah repeat the prohibition against seeking the advice of oracles and mediums, three separate times? Why are laws such as Shatnez and not crossbreeding lumped together with the laws of honoring parents, sexual prohibitions, maintaining justice, and not visiting practitioners of the occult?

As stated in verse 20:26, the reason for the laws of Kedusha is, "You are to be holy because I (G-d) am holy." The laws of sanctity set us apart from all the other nations and establish a unique bond between G-d and ourselves. The same could be said for all the Mitzvos; however, it is specifically in regards to the laws of Kedusha - sanctity that the Torah states this reason of "being like G-d." Why?

The belief in a G-d who created the universe is intended to focus us on G-d's reasons for creating

the universe and all who inhabit it. The greater our awareness of G-d, the greater our acceptance that everything in the world has a unique purpose and destiny. The Talmud relates an incident with the Yom Kippur goat that had been chosen to be sent into the desert rather than being offered as a sacrifice in the Temple. The goat had run away in protest at what it perceived as being a less important destiny than its twin goat because it had been chosen to die in the desert rather than on the altar. The great Rabbi Akiva comforted the goat by telling it, "This is why you were created. Your personal destiny is to serve your Maker by being sent into the desert." The goat willingly went to serve its destiny. (Note: An otherwise non free-willed creature exhibiting free will in its service to G-d, specifically on Yom Kippur - the holiest day of the year.)

Our behavior in all arenas of life, family, social, business, personal, and religious, should reflect our acceptance of G-d's dominion and His reasons for creating all things. To truly appreciate why G-d created every little thing is impossible for us to ever attain. It would take many lifetimes for us to study and understand the particular destiny of each element in our world. (Another reason why the pre-diluvium generations lived so long.) However, our behavior can certainly reflect our acceptance of the fact, regardless of our understanding. (Another application of the concept of "Naaseh Vnishmah - We will do and then we will attempt to understand.")

Our primary way for showing our acceptance of G-d's dominion is to listen to His Mitzvos. Whether we understand G-d's exact reasons or not, and keep in mind that 97% of all the Mitzvos can and should be understood, by following His instructions we express our trust that He (G-d) knows what He is doing.

The practical meaning of Kedusha - sanctity is the specific designation of function and purpose. Keeping that in mind, we can review each Mitzvah in this week's two Parshios and understand why they were selected as examples of sanctity.

Whether the fifteen prohibited sexual relationships; the prohibition against wearing Shatnez; the prohibition against all forms of crossbreeding; the need for proper justice, or the commandment to honor parents, the understanding of Kedusha as emphasizing designation of purpose through separation remains consistent - regardless of whether or not we understand the exact reason for each Mitzvah. In truth, the very fact that certain Mitzvos are not easily understood is itself a lesson in separation and sanctity. We need to learn and accept that we are not G-d. There are many times that G-d, like parents and teachers, sometimes knows better - whether we like it or not.

Separation grants us the ability to see all things as unique and special. (Another good reason for parents and educators to revisit their more liberal approach to the Boy - Girl issue and what the Halacha truly expects of our behavior.) The very first Bracha in the weekday Amidah (Shemoneh Esray) asks that we be granted, "Dayah, Binah, V'Haskel - wisdom, insight, and discernment." The ordering of the three components of intellectual understanding is intentional. Discernment is the highest level of understanding, because our willful acceptance of G-d's commandments is possible

only at the level where we are fully cognizant of G-d's reasons and intentions. (Keep in mind that although we said "Naaseh V'Nishmah - We will do and then we will attempt to understand," the second level, and therefore the higher level, was V'Nishmah!) Only if we know G-d's will can we truly choose not to listen or yes to listen.

I have always been fascinated and intrigued with the willingness of people to seek "spiritual advice" from a garishly dressed, Gypsy - like, Madam Whomever. Aside from the obvious caricatureness of the scene, I assume that they would not be in business unless there was a market for such services. The same is true for the more sophisticated marketing of Psychic hot lines and products. Why would any intelligent person willingly turn to a medium of sorts for advice and answers?

As already stated, discernment is the highest form of understanding because it allows us to recognize and accept the limitations of our own mortal intellect. By accepting our own limitations in relation to G-d, we also accept that we are not in control of the universe, or our own lives. If we are not in control of our own destinies, and G-d is, then the only avenue for us to exert any control over our own destinies is through following G-d's instructions and doing as He commands -regardless of whether we understand or agree. However, that degree of real control comes with the price of our willfully giving up the option of doing what we want and not listening to G-d. Guess what? That has been humanities most fundamental struggle since the time that Chava and Adam decided to eat from the tree of knowledge!

What happens if a person refuses to accept the limitation of his own control over life? Does he then have more control? Of course not! The only thing he is left with is futilely attempting to understand why things happen to him and to the world in the manner that they do. Why do good people suffer? Why do little children die? Why must apples fall down instead of up? From the sublime to the mundane, there will always be more questions than answers. Yet, we humans desire control, and I either accept that I am subject to the design of a superior power, for better or for worse, or I need to have answers.

Psychic hot lines and Madams Whomever are as old as time itself. As Shlomo Hamelech said, "There is nothing new beneath the sun." Our desire for control and answers allows us to believe in the irrational and the ridiculous, so long as it does not limit the pursuit of our desires. We willingly accept the ridiculous as cause and reason so long as it does not include imposing a superior intelligence over our own. The acceptance of a superior intelligence forces us to do whatever that superior intelligence commands; otherwise, we have no control. Through believing in the occult and the superstitious, we proclaim that there is no rhyme and reason to what happens. Therefore, there is no reason not to do as we desire, so long as we can somehow find out what the "powers that be" have in mind for us. Then, we can at least prepare ourselves to deal with the inevitable and thereby exert some degree of control-without being responsible to any other moral or ethical system of restrictions.

Considering our tendency away from acceptance and obligation and toward the irrational, the Torah forewarned us to stay away from oracle and mediums. Sanctity, which is this week's focus, involves accepting G-d's reasons for whatever is and whatever happens, regardless of our comprehension or agreement. If we can do so, and also accept our own limitations, then we can be G-d's holy people.

Iyar 5, 1948 to 5760

The State of Israel is an event of unparalleled historic importance. Since the destruction of the second Bais Hamikdash we have been a nation without a land. True, we never stopped praying for our return to the land; however, for 2,000 years Hashem did not agree to our tears and prayers. Fifty years ago, G-d deemed us worthy of returning to our home.

Maybe because we had offered 6,000,000 pure and blameless burnt offerings.

Maybe because Hashem's pitcher of tears is nearing full.

Maybe because the supplications of the Avos (Fathers) and Imahos (Mothers) had been joined by a chorus of 6 million more voices singing His praises and demanding His love.

I don't know why we finally merited seeing the realization of our prayers. However, as Rav Kook Zt'l writes, "The establishment of the State of Israel allowed the Jewish people to once again become a nation. In the Golah we are individual Jews. However, our purpose is to be a Holy Nation, a light onto the word. This cannot be done when we are scattered all over the world under the authority of the other nations. It can only be accomplished when we are together in our Holy Land as a Nation." (As heard from a Shiur by Rav Shabbtai Rappaport)

Rav Eliyahu Kitov writes, "In the year 5708, on the 5th of Iyar, there arose men of the seed of Yakov, and they stood upon the soil of the Holy Land and declared, "This land upon which we dwell and cling to with all our might belongs to us, to us alone, and to our children afterwards forever! No sovereignty or rule shall prevail in this land save that of her sons, the children of Israel, who are reclaiming their stolen inheritance. Let them all come from the four corners of the earth and inherit their eternal possession.

When you see people of Israel who are thankful for all the good, but who still pray for G-d's redemption to be complete, join them! But if you see people of Israel whose hearts are divided and who are unable to recognize the goodness that has been bequeathed them, pray for them to be granted clarity of vision to see G-d's salvation, and for yourself to be rescued from the blindness and ingratitude into which they have fallen. Let your mouth be filled with song and praise to G-d for what He did, for what He does, and for what He will do."

This coming week, it is incumbent upon us to proclaim to ourselves and our children that we see the miracles of G-d that "are with us daily; evening, morning, and afternoon." The problems that beset our beloved State of Israel, internally and externally, are complex and apparent; however, her existence is still the single greatest revelation of G-d's love and protection since the second Bais

Hamikdash. (Possibly since the time of Purim)

Often, within the majestic tapestry of history, the true greatness of G-d's love for us is lost. We can all either recall or have studied the great moments of our modern miracle: The establishment of the state; the breath taking revelation of the Six Day War; the unbelievable rekindling of a generations desire to do Teshuva and return to the ways of their ancestors; the fears of that fateful Yom Kippur; the pain and anguish of our war in Lebanon; the hopes and often disappointments for a seemingly impossible peace, and our ongoing battle against the horrors of terrorism. Within such a whirlwind of earth shattering front-page events we tend to forget the true miracle that is Eretz Yisroel.

Let me share with you the simple joys of reveling in G-d's revealed presence in a land whose Kedusha - sanctity is as real as the smell of Angel's freshly baked bread.

To touch and even kiss the stones of the Kotel.

To walk the streets of Yerushalayim and know in the depths of your soul that you have come home.

To stand at the corner of Rechov Strauss and Malchei Yisroel on Erev Shabbos and wonder, "Where did all these Jews come from?"

To ride a bus and see the full spectrum of our people sitting shoulder to shoulder - some touching and some doing their very best not to!

How many of us have been to Israel to visit our children who are learning in Yeshivos and Seminaries in a manner that 30 years ago was considered extraordinary and unique? Can anyone determine the changes that have resulted from two generations of Torah study within the shadow of Yerushalayim's walls?

To have walked through the ruins of Masada, floated in the Dead Sea, swam in the Kineret, hiked the paths of Ein Gedi, snorkeled in the Sinai, and traced Avraham and Yitzchak's steps through the hills of Judah and Shomron as they made their way to the Akeidah - Binding.

However, there is one miracle that is so real and commonplace that it takes the words of the prophet Zechariah to highlight the meaning of redemption and the revelation of G-d's love. Throughout Eretz Yisroel, the modern State of Israel, you can visit parks and playgrounds where young children run freely, playing, climbing, and scraping their knees. At the same time, watching over them, or simply enjoying the warmth of the sun or a cool breeze, the elderly of our people sit on park benches enveloped in the normalcy of life and living.

"Thus says Hashem: Old men and old women shall again dwell in the streets of Yerushalayim and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in her streets." (Zechariya 8:4)

To be alive and to witness the fulfillment of promises and the realization of prophecy is a gift truly deserving of rejoicing and gladness. May we all merit to see the coming of Mashiach, and the building of the Bais Hamikdash, speedily and in our days!

Copyright © 2000 by Rabbi Aron Tendler and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
