

UNIQUENESS - WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT?

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The end of Parshas Shimini declared the uniqueness of the Jew. "Be holy because I am holy." Just as G-d is singular and unique, so too should the Jews be singular and unique. Just as G-d is the only G-d, so too the Jews are the only chosen people. Just as G-d provides for the entire universe, so too must the Jews care for all of humanity.

There are three basic Mitzvos that make the Jew unique. There are three commandments that set the Jew apart from all the other nations. There are three areas of life that sanctify the Jew and make them holy: Shabbos - the Sabbath, Kashrus - the dietary laws, and Tahars Hamishpacha - the laws of family purity. Shabbos was commanded at Marah and Matan Torah (Sinai). Kashrus was commanded to the Jews in last week's Parsha. The laws of family purity are introduced in this week's Parsha.

The Mishnah in Megilah states that additional Aliyos are permitted during the reading of the Torah on Yom Tov, Yom Kippur, and Shabbos. However, the commentaries argue as to the meaning of the Mishnah. The "Ran" says that additional Aliyos are allowed on all three, Shabbos, Yom Kippur, and Yom Tov. Others state that additional Aliyos are only permitted on Sabbos but not on Yom Kippur or Yom Tov.

On Monday, Thursday, Shabbos Mincha, Rosh Chodesh, and Chol Hamoed we do not have additional Aliyos because they are work-days, (Shabbos at Mincha is the obvious exception) and the Rabbis did not want to impose extra time on the Minyan who are rushing to get to work. However, Yom Kippur and Yom Tov are not workdays. Why wouldn't there be additional Aliyos on those days?

The commentaries explain that the reason for Shabbos's exclusivity relative to Yom Kippur and Yom Tov is to under-score that Shabbos is holier than Yom Tov, and even Yom Kippur! Therefore we add Aliyos on Shabbos and not on the others.

I believe that, if asked, most people would say that Yom Kippur is holier than Shabbos. Why do the commentaries say that Shabbos is holier than Yom Kippur?

Holiness - Kedusha, is a designation of separation and uniqueness; it does not mean seriousness and intensity. I remember listening to a pre-High Holiday radio program where a Reform Rabbi explained that he would prefer that the one-time-a-year "Davener", the Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur Jew, would come to services on a Shabbos, rather than the High Holidays. The Yomim Noraim are serious, intense, imposing, lengthy, and occasionally boring. Lengthy sermons, fasting, appeals for funds, and tedious prayers do not make for an inviting setting. It is understandable why the one-timers do

not come back, except one time a year. If the one-timers would experience a Shabbos service with singing, socializing, eating, and joy, they might come back for more.

The reason why Shabbos is holier than Yom Kippur is because Shabbos identifies the Jew as chosen far more than Yom Kippur. It is Shabbos that separates the observant from the non-observant. It is Shabbos that separates the Jew from the non-Jew. Many religions have a designated time during the year to reflect, introspect, and atone. Only Judaism has Shabbos. Only Shabbos is called G-d's "present" to the Jewish people. Therefore, Shabbos is holier than Yom Kippur.

Kashrus also separates the Jew from the rest of the world and makes them holy. As stated in last week's Parsha, "Be holy because I am holy." The eating habits of the Jew overtly designate us as different. Special meals on planes, matzo and hard-boiled eggs in Disney Land, green salads and Styrofoam cups of coffee at business lunches, and chickens that still need to be plucked. It is Kashrus that designates the fully observant from the less so. Do you "eat out?" "Pasta and tuna fish, never meat," vs. Who's Hashgacha (supervision) do you have? Oh - we don't use that one." Therefore, Kashrus is a major component of our sanctity-Kedusha.

In this week's Parsha, the Torah completes the threesome of Kedusha. Taharas Hamishpacha - family purity separates our family life from all others. Yahadus - Judaism is the only life style that frames family life and intimacy in sanctity and responsibility. It is unique among all the religions of the world. Love is cherished, intimacy is revered, and family is a partnership with G-d.

The threesome of Kedusha, Shabbos, Kashrus, and Taharas Hamishpacha are the basic criteria for being truly observant. Shabbos gives purpose and meaning to time. Kashrus lends meaning and purpose to personal survival and existence. Family Purity cloaks family and society in respect and purpose.

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