

# I AM BECAUSE I AM NOT

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

Last week's Rabbi's Notebook explained how the nation and the individual are intertwined regarding Teshuva (repentance). The individual can only do Teshuva for the component of the sin that relates to his or her personal relationship with G-d. To accomplish Teshuva for the national component of sin the individual must have help from the Bais Hamikdash (Temple) and the Kohanim (priests).

Kedusha (sanctity), like Teshuva is an entity that intertwines the individual and the nation. The focus of this week's Parsha is the Kedusha of the individual and the Kedusha of the nation.

Kedusha of the individual is accomplished by doing those things that make the Jew different from the rest of his or her society and not doing those things that would make the Jew similar to his or her society.

Kedusha of the nation is the product of two components.

1. The nation as a whole doing those things that make it different from the other nations and not doing those things that would make it similar to the other nations.  
(Example of those things that make the nation different: Korbonos Tzibur (public sacrifice), the Bais Hamikdash, the manner in which the public relates to the designation of the tribe of Layvie, the land of Israel as a whole, and not practicing or worshiping as the other nations worship and practice.)
2. The sum total of the Kedusha of all the individuals comprising the nation.

From this perspective, the active or passive removal of the differences between ourselves and the other nations is termed "sinning." Active sinning is doing that which makes us similar to everyone else and passive sinning is not doing the many Mitzvos that make us different from everyone else.

(Please note that being different as a nation and as an individual is dictated and circumscribed by the Mitzvos and the rabbinic enactments. More so than that is a matter of personal preference and not halachik mandate.)

Individual sinning and national sinning are closely linked to each other. The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva explains that G-d judges the individual and G-d judges the public. The individual is judged by weighing the merits and sins of his personal record. The public is judged by first calculating and then weighing the sum total of the merits and sins of all the individuals making up the public.

As mentioned in last week's Rabbi's Notebook, G-d gave the Torah to the nation and specifically did not give it to an individual. The Mitzvos that the Forefathers and Mothers kept were revealed to them through prophecy and passed on to their children as personal commandments and traditions. Those Mitzvos were then regiven to Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish People at Matan Torah (Revelation).

Matan Torah established the primacy of the nation over the individual. Matan Torah proved that as important as individual effort is for the individual it is even more important as a component of the national whole. As important as personal Teshuva, sinning, and Kedusha are to the individual's relationship with G-d they are even more important to the nation's relationship with G-d.

G-d defined our national essence before giving us the Torah as "A kingdom of priests and a holy nation." He did not define us as individuals who are priestly and holy. G-d did not say to us, "Each of you become priestly and holy." G-d defined us in the plural and the collective whole.

In the Dayenu we say, "Had You brought us to Har Sinai and not given us the Torah - that would have been enough!" Why? For what purpose and reason? The whole reason for going to Egypt and leaving Egypt was to receive the Torah! How could it have been enough to just gather at the foot of Har Sinai?

We are told that the prerequisite for receiving the Torah was our becoming a unified nation, "As one individual with one purpose (heart)." That was the Dayenu! Becoming a single entity, becoming a kingdom of priests and a holy nation was paramount. Of course, becoming "as one" required individual and personal commitment; however, the focus was clearly the primacy of the nation more than the perfection of the individual.

In many regards perfection of the individual is for the purpose of perfecting the nation. This concept can be extended across the expanses of the past and the future. Individual efforts toward perfection contribute to confirming all of the past as well as preparing for the eventual completion of the future.

A note about Moshe:

The reason G-d gave the Torah to Moshe was because the nation asked Him to do so. (Shemos 20:16) "You (Moshe) speak to us, not G-d? and we will not die."

This is confirmed in Sefer Bamidbar (Book of Numbers) when Miriam and Aharon criticized Moshe for being "less than sensitive" in his relationship with his wife Tziporah. What Aharon and Miriam failed to appreciate about Moshe was the single-minded devotion the position of "Rabbeinu" demanded. It was a position from which there was no reprieve or vacation. The position left no room for self or selfishness. There was no room for family. There was only room for G-d and His people. Moshe did not behave like everyone else because he was no longer "Moshe the Man." He had become Moshe Rabbeinu, the Teacher of the nation.

The position of Kohain Gadol was almost as restrictive. The unique responsibilities of the Kohain

Gadol were daily. It meant that he had to always be there to serve in the Temple. He could not go on vacation or travel very far. There was no reprieve from the duties of the position. He had to maintain his level of Taharah. He could not marry certain women. In preparation for entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur he had to separate from his wife for one week. He was even restricted from attending the funerals of his closest relatives.

Getting back to Kedusha.

Kedusha manifests itself in three dimensions: time, space, and person. The Bais Hamikdash represented the sanctity of place. The Kohanim represented the sanctity of person, and Shabbos and the holidays detailed in this week's Parsha represent the sanctity of time.

As with sinning and Teshuva there is a national and a personal component to the three manifestations of Kedusha. The persons of the Kohanim, and especially the person of the Kohain Gadol, manifested the Kedusha of person. Their sanctity was unique. Their Kedusha was more intense. The laws governing their behavior were more restrictive and detailed. They represented both themselves and they represented the entire nation. To the extent that the Kohanim maintained their personal levels of Kedusha was the extent to which they could properly represent the nation. Therefore, the person of the Kohain was secondary to the being of the nation. The Kohain, in his capacity as a Kohain, had to become nondescript and indistinguishable. Similar to Matan Torah, the nation was paramount, not the individual.

Even the physical selves of the Kohanim had to be non-descript. This week's Parsha restricts a Kohain who is disfigured or deformed in some way from serving the nation. The Kohain could not be distinguished physically or else he would not be nondescript in his service to G-d and the nation. As mentioned last week, the Kohain had to be able to disappear beneath the folds of his Talis and become a reflection of the congregation he served. He had to symbolically lose himself and his self. Physical disfigurement or deformities made it impossible for the Kohain to symbolically disappear.

Like the Kohain, members of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court) could not be deformed or disfigured. They too represented the wholeness of the nation's subjugation to G-d and the Torah. They too could not be distinguished from the whole by physical deformity and disfigurement.

At the end of this week's Parsha, the Torah recorded the incident of the M'Kallel - the Blasphemer. In essence, the Blasphemer refused to accept Moshe's ruling regarding his personal status and cursed G-d. He refused to subjugate his self and himself to the dictates of G-d's law as ruled by Moshe Rabbeinu the servant of G-d. The punishment for his blasphemy was death by stoning. (24:14, 16, 23)

Verse (24:14) says, "...and the whole congregation should stone him." Rashi comments, "In the presence of the entire congregation. From here we derive that a person's messenger (proxy) is like himself."

The function of the Shaliach Bais Din, (agent of the court), was to represent the court and thereby represent the entire nation. The critics who gleefully reference this incident as proof of the early Bnai Yisroel's bloodthirsty barbarism (shades of "The Harvest") never took the time to learn the true meaning of these verses. Yes, the nation did stone (not in the manner of the "Harvest but involving the placing of a stone on the chest of the "sinner" after he had been killed in a swift and "humane" fashion.) the Blasphemer because the agents of Bais Din, like the members of Sanhedrin, the Kohanim, the Kohain Gadol, Moshe Rabbeinu, and the entire nation at the time of Matan Torah, had no self other than their subjugation to G-d, Torah, and the nation. The death penalty was never executed by a mob of people. It was always done with the greatest concern for the dignity due a human created in the image of G-d. However, in being carried out by the court the death penalty was done "by the People."

The sanctification of self can only be realized in the humility of nationhood. The sanctity of nationhood can only be realized in the realization of individual devotion. We are more because we are less and in the loss of self we become far more than we are. So it was with Moshe. So it was with Aharon. So it should be reflected in the institution of Priesthood. So it should be reflected in the halls of justice.

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The author is the Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA, and Assistant Principal of YULA.