

DIFFERENT AND BEYOND

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Kedusha is the designation of purpose and therefore value. Purpose and therefore value are functions of our belief in G-d. To the extent that we believe in the singular and absolute significance of G-d is the extent to which all our actions will be motivated and directed by the desire to attach ourselves to the significance of G-d and the degree to which all our actions will have purpose and value.

Kedusha is more than the understanding of true purpose and value. Kedusha is the imposition of purpose and value over all actions and attitudes. It presumes the discipline to do the will of G-d at all times regardless of emotional or intellectual questions and reservations. This week's Parsha challenges us to accept Hashem's significance and extend purpose and value to all aspects of life.

1. The regular Kohain may not engage in the Mitzvah of burying the dead unless it is one of his seven closest relatives (parent, child, sibling, spouse). The exception is the unattended body where the Mitzvah of attending to the burial takes precedence over even the protected sanctity of the Kohain Gadol (High Priest). (This assumes that there is no one else to bury the body.)

Why would the burial of an unattended, dead, stranger take precedent over the sanctity of the Kohain whereas his closest non-relative would not?

2. A Kohain may not marry a divorcee, a convert, or any woman with the legal classification of a "Zonah." The divorcee, convert, or Zonah could be the most wonderful woman in the world. The Kohain could be convinced that she is his "basheret," his soul mate; yet, they are forbidden to marry.

Why?

3. The Kohain Gadol is restricted in all the ways that the regular Kohain is restricted. Additionally, he cannot attend the funerals of his seven closest relatives and cannot marry a widow.

Why?

4. A Kohain who is born with a deformity or becomes so because of time or circumstance may not participate in the Temple service. To do so is called a desecration. The "blemished" Kohain could be the greatest and most pious of all the Kohanim; yet, he would be prohibited from attending to the Mizbeach (alter).

Is G-d so petty and insensitive that He cares more about appearances than substance and character?

5. The Kohanim are an exclusive group with both rights and restrictions. They are gifted with eating Terumah (tithes) and certain parts of the Korbanos (offerings). At the same time they are restricted to a much more rarefied environment of purity than the regular Jew - Yisroel. If the Kohanim wish to partake of their rights they must first adhere to their restrictions.

The same is true for the daughter of a Kohain. She too is gifted and restricted when it comes to Terumah and Korbanos; however, she must marry a Kohain to retain those rights. If she should marry a non-Kohain she forfeits all her ancestral rights in favor of her husband's non-Kohain status.

Why? Regardless of whom she marries she is of the same genetic makeup as her male siblings. Why should she lose the right of partaking from her father's table?

6. Blemished animals are forbidden on the Mizbeach. If the blemish / deformity is severe enough that the animal is classified as "Treif" (not kosher) it makes sense that it is unfit for the Mizbeach. At the very least an offering must be Kosher. However, a split lip, eye infection, or skin condition does not render an animal treif, yet, it does render it unfit for the Mizbeach.

If G-d made it and we can eat it (meaning, it is only treif to offer on the alter but is permitted to be eaten) why shouldn't it be fit for the Mizbeach?

7. A first-born sheep or goat must be offered as a Korban. Similar to the concept of Bris Milah (circumcision), the newborn calf stays with its mother until it is eight days old after which it is offered as a Korban. The Torah then states that a mother cow / ox and her calf cannot be slaughtered on the same day.

What is with the mixed messages? On the one hand the eight-day-old calf is "torn away" from its mother after they have had a chance to bond with each other and is offered as a Korban. On the other hand, the Torah forbids the slaughtering of a mother animal and her offspring on the same day! Is it a question of sensitivity or a concern for compassion?

Furthermore, the Torah concludes these laws of Kedusha and sanctification by stating, (22:31-33) "...observe My Mitzvos... do not desecrate My Holy Name... I am G-d Who sanctifies you... Who took you out of Egypt..." Why does the Torah make this statement at this specific juncture?

Death, marriage, disabilities, class distinctions, privileges, and mandated sensitivities, are life events and attitudes that define the values of a society. They challenge us to revisit the cherished ideals of individuality, democracy, and equality from the perspective of responsibility that is either divinely or socially mandated.

On the one hand it acknowledges the reality of differences. Whether naturally or divinely imposed (not that there is much difference) differences dictate consequences. Our expectations for the naturally gifted student whose grasp of information and application are seemingly effortless are far greater than the student who struggles with basic logical constructs. The gifted student may receive more attention and encouragement than the non-gifted student and will earn greater consequences

for both successes and failures. On the one hand there is the greater potential for reward; on the other hand there is the greater possibility of failure and disappointment.

Is it fair? Is it moral? Is it right that some are born with more and some with less?

The Torah tells us that fairness or rightness have nothing to do with the reality of differences. The only absolute fairness and equality that exist in the realm of differences is the responsibility to accept that which is and attempt to realize the purpose and value intended by G-d. Whether Kohain or Yisroel, whether Kohain or Kohain Gadol, whether divorced or widowed, born Jewish or immersed Jewish, seemingly sensitive or grossly insensitive, the challenge of accepting G-d at face value is across the board.

The blemished Kohain is no less valuable than the unblemished Kohain so long as they assign significance by G-d's intent rather than their own. The Kohain's daughter who may no longer partake of her father's Terumah because she married a non-Kohain is no less valuable in the context of nation and G-d than her male siblings who minister to the people and must conduct their lives in purity. G-d delights in dirty diapers, laundry, and homework no differently than He does in the sweet incense of the Ketores. Both are equally essential because He commanded them. Both are equally important because He determines importance. Both are equally valuable because He established their significance.

Compassion is a natural characteristic of our people. However, compassion is only trustworthy when expressed within the framework of G-d's Mitzvos. Not every expression of compassion is beneficial to the recipient and not every act of compassion accomplishes what we intend. How can we know when to be compassionate and when to withhold compassion? The only absolute scale is to do what G-d commands.

(22:31) The verse states, "You shall observe my Mitzvos and perform them..." Rashi quotes the Medresh that explains, "Observe" means to study and "perform" means to do. If we study G-d's Mitzvos and then do what we understand to be His will, the verse concludes, "I am G-d." That is the meaning of Kedusha and that is the only way for us to be a holy people.

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