

THE SANCTITY CONNECTION

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In the double Parshios of Acharei Mos and Kedoshim that were read two weeks ago, I explained that the essence of sanctity is accepting G-d as the only arbiter of absolute value and purpose. The Torah referenced the deaths of Nadav and Avihu (the two eldest sons of Aharon) who died for assigning value and purpose where they had no right to do so. The Torah also detailed the Yom Kippur service which was the annual moment when the sanctity of time, place and person came together in perfect harmony and service. The contrast between the deaths of Nadav and Avihu and the Yom Kippur service directs us to better understand the essence of sanctity.

At the end of Parshas Acharei Mos and again at the end of last week's Parsha Kedoshim, the Torah presented the fifteen prohibited intimate relationships and their punishments. Citing fifteen forbidden permutations of intimacy, G-d selected the strongest of all human desires as the setting wherein which absolute sanctity could be accomplished or destroyed.

Intimacy framed and braced by the circumscription of G-d's law provides for the unification of sanctity in all its glory. Intimacy framed and braced by the circumscription of G-d's law equals family. Within the context and setting of family is continuity of values, truth, and sanctity. However, desire expressed in all the wrong ways destroys that which is good and beautiful in the world. Values become as arbitrary and contradictory as subjective rationalization can justify them. Truth ceases to be eternal and instead exists solely in the here and now of momentary human want and self centeredness. In the end, sanctity is replaced by the edification of all that is animal and base. There is no purpose, there is no redemption, there is no sanctity, and there is no G-d. The only thing that then exists is the human animal, his wants and his desires. All other values and purposes cease to be.

To be holy, to be sanctified, we must be G-d-like. We must know the difference between absolute good and absolute bad. Whether the original Tree in the Garden of Eden or the living tree of Torah, our purpose is to know what is good and what is bad. To do so we must know G-d and we must do as He does.

The Talmud tells us that the Shechina (G-d's presence) resides within the proper union of a husband and wife. In a confused world absent of Divine awareness the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Bais Hamikdash (Temple in Jerusalem) were supposed to be the place of G-d's manifest presence. It was where G-d said he would Be. 'Make Me a Mishkan wherein which I can dwell among you.' However, it was never intended that G-d's presence would not reside elsewhere. The difference was in the

manifest quality of His presence. In the Mishkan and Bais Hamikdash His presence was His doing. He showed Himself or He did not. He resided within the wooden (Tabernacle) or marble walls (Bais Hamikdash) or He elected to leave. In return we were obligated to recognize His presence through the routines of Avodah (devotional service) and the institution of sacrifice. However, doing so expressed our awareness but did not guarantee His revelation. (Proof is in contrasting the first and second Temples. In both, the Avodah was performed and the Korbanos (sacrifices) offered; however, in the First Temple His presence was revealed through the "ten" miracles. In the Second Temple, the miracles were no longer manifest.)

On the other hand, outside of the walls of Mishkan and the Bais Hamikdash it was up to us to reveal His presence or invite His revelation. Our actions dictated whether or not He would be manifest. If we were G-d fearing and devoted to a lifestyle of Torah and Mitzvos, Hashem's Shechina would reside among us. If not, Hashem told us that He does not go where He is not invited.

As I said earlier, it was never intended for G-d's presence to only be in the Mishkan or Temple. The difference is that in His house He does not need an invitation to Be; in our homes He waits for the invitation. The greatest invitation is the home setting and the basic union between a man and a woman, a husband and his wife. If the relationship is founded and conducted on principled values of kindness, generosity, fear of G-d, and continuity, His Shechina is in evidence. If however the opposite is true, G-d knows when and where He is not wanted. Where G-d's presence is recognized and manifest there is sanctity - Kedusha.

Last week's Parshas Emor directed the discussion of sanctity to the next level. Nadav and Avihu had died. At the moment that G-d accepted the offered Korbanos in a bolt of heavenly fire He also took back the greatness that were Nadav and Avihu. They attempted to know G-d and reveal Him in a manner that had not been taught to them, in a manner that was not dictated by G-d. They wished to be G-d-like but forgot that they stood in His home. Whether or not He would reveal Himself (and extend the royal scepter) was not up to them - it was only up to Hashem. Their job was to recognize Him and make Him known, not to dictate the time or place of His revelation. In clear and absolute retrospect, the Mishkan, the Ketores (incense offering), and the Holy of Holies, were not the proper setting for innovation.

Not so with the family. The dictates of Torah and Mitzvos for the family setting allow for great innovation and creativity. "Educate each child according to his way." Ancient teachings, absolute values, ideals, and truths can never change; however, how they are taught and presented must allow for creativity.

Creativity without circumspection breeds perversion. There must always be the absolutes of right and wrong, good and bad directing the creative mind toward truth and away from falsehood. How much more so when dealing with the source of creativity and the most powerful of all human drives and desires. That is why the Torah listed the fifteen prohibited relationships two times, once at the

end of Acharei Mos and the second time at the end of Kedoshim where the Torah detailed their punishments if transgressed.

The fifteen prohibited relationships became the immutable and inflexible frame that contains and directs the creative source. It became the boundaries within which family can exist and beyond which goodness and purpose are perverted and destroyed. Focusing on family and the uniqueness of the partnership wherein which the Shechina is or is not manifest, Emor began with the added restrictions on the family of the Kohanim. And it makes perfect sense. If family is the innovative setting for sanctity and the manifestation of G-d in the world, then the Kohanim, the family of Aharon, is the example of what G-d intended the family to look like. However, the Kohanim are not free to express their sanctity in the same manner as the rest of the nation. They are the ones who spent the most time within G-d's own home. As explained before, G-d's home is the place where we can at best respond to His chosen revelation rather than initiate contact and reveal His Shechina. Therefore, there must be greater restrictions and circumspection for the Kohanim than for any other family.

At the end of Emor, the Torah recorded the story of the M'Kallel - the blasphemer. He was the son of the Egyptian killed by Moshe way back when. Raised as a Jew and attached to the Tribe of Reuven, he discovered that he was a man without a country. His mother was Jewish so he was Jewish. His father was Egyptian so he was still Jewish; but, the division of the land among the tribes was a consequence of patrilineal descent and not matrilineal descent. Discovering his non-tribal status he demanded from Moshe a legal ruling. Moshe ruled that although Jewish, he did not have a claim on the land. Enraged with the ruling and accusing Moshe of being biased against him because Moshe had killed his father, the man blasphemed.

The association of the M'Kallel with the previous discussion of sanctity and circumspection is clear. Family extends into tribe and tribe becomes nation. The framework of absolutes that contain and direct the sanctity of family are the foundation of the nation. Nothing can be more important in establishing value, purpose, and the identity of the Jewish people. Personal preference, finance, and desire have no bearing on the absolutes of the family structure and setting. Yet, at the same time there is a fundamental equality that is the direct consequence of being human. That value is as much an immutable absolute as any other value or construct. Therefore, when the M'Kallel publicly blasphemed his frustration he transgressed an absolute and in doing so forfeited his life. The fundamental structure of life and the universe is the immutable reality of G-d's presence, manifest or not. To deny it is to refuse sanctity.

(Note: Underscoring the connection between Nadav and Avihu, sanctity, family, Kehunah, and the Blasphemer are the final verses of Emor that set forever the universal value of life and property.)

In B'Har, the first of this week's two Parshios, the Torah associates the laws of land ownership and economy with the moment of revelation at Mt. Sinai. Rashi explains the association. "Just as the

particulars and nuances of the laws of land ownership and commerce were divinely given to the Jews at Mt. Sinai, so too, all the commandments were given to the nation along with all their particulars and nuances."

It is true that the Torah devotes the first 35 verses of this week's Parsha to the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years; however, there are other Mitzvos whose presentations are equally extensive and detailed. Why did the Torah choose this moment to make the association to Mt. Sinai when as Rashi explained every Mitzvah was given on Mt. Sinai with all nuances and particulars? The same lesson could have been extracted from any of the Mitzvos?

Next to human relationships and intimacy, there are few forces as strong as the desire to acquire physical possessions. The desire for power may be greater but it too is mostly founded (or funded) on personal wealth and possession. Land acquisition, whether purchased, taken, or inherited, has always been the most real and lasting of all physical possessions and the basis for extreme wealth. The Torah, in continuing the theme of the previous three Parshios, adds one more example that the true essence of sanctity is accepting G-d as the only arbiter of absolute value and purpose. It is true when it comes to the sanctity of person as portrayed by the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. It is true when it comes to the sanctity of time and service as reflected in the detailed Avodah (devotional service) of Yom Kippur. It is repeatedly presented when detailing the fifteen prohibited relationships and their consequences, and it is equally relevant when applied to land ownership and the foundation of economic wealth and power. To the extent that we frame our mortality with divine commandments is the extent to which we engage G-d's presence in our lives, in our homes, and in our society. That is the meaning of being sanctified - being holy - being Kadosh.

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