

# KIDDUSH AND HAVDALAH

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Parshat Parah deals with process of purification and making one's self holy. This is also the theme of Parshat Shmini, the parsha that Parshat Parah coincides with this year. The parsha of Shmini concludes with an admonition that Jews must retain the ability to differentiate between the sacred and the profane, between the pure and the defiled, between what is permissible to be eaten and what is forbidden. Rashi comments on this that it is insufficient to have superficial book-knowledge of these things but one must become an expert in this ability to differentiate and recognize the differences inherent in what is proper and what is not. After Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the famed founder of Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin in prewar Poland visited the United States; he was asked his impression of American Jewry. In his usual incisive and pithy style he answered: "They know how to make kiddush. They do not know how to make havdala." The inability to differentiate between the holy and the profane, between right and wrong, between eternal Torah values and passing, currently politically correct fads has destroyed many Jews spiritually and physically in our time. Everything is morally equivalent, everything can be altered to fit one's whims, faith is rendered simplistic and unnecessary and there is no moral base line left. Look about the wreckage of modern society strewn all around us and you will see the cost of being unable to make havdala.

The Torah warned us of the consequences of being unable or unwilling to differentiate in our personal and national lives. The disciplines of Shabat, kashrut, family purity, etc.- aside from their own intrinsic values and worth - helped inculcate within the Jewish people an acute sense of expertise in being able to differentiate between the eternal and the temporary, between right and wrong. The abandonment of those disciplines over the past few centuries by large sections of the Jewish people has led to monumental social and personal disasters. In today's climate of moral equivalency there is no right or wrong, there is no sacred space or time - there is only the drudgery of the pursuit of the pleasures that always seem to elude us. And in order to justify this irrational, self-destructive and many times completely immoral behavior, there are those who see fit to "reinterpret" the Torah to "fit our times." "Reinterpreting the Torah" destroys any chance at becoming an expert in differentiation.

It is obvious from reading and studying this week's parsha that the Torah intended not only that we eat kosher food but that we become kosher people. Kosher speech, kosher behavior, kosher money, kosher dealings with others are all in the purview of being able to differentiate between what is to be eaten and is not to be eaten. Being careful in using products with proper kosher certification - a field of one-upmanship that has reached spectacular heights in our day and society - is

commendable. But it is not the goal itself, it is only meant to be a means towards becoming a kosher person - one who is sensitive towards others and can differentiate between the petty and the solid, between the eternal and the transitory. Shmini cries out to us to sharpen our abilities to differentiate and aim towards becoming a holy people.

Shabat shalom.

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