

# EVERYDAY HOLINESS

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The word *kdoshim* is usually translated as holy. This is a difficult translation, although the word can certainly mean holy. The difficulty lies in defining the word holy in practical terms. One person's holiness is sometimes the destruction of others - witness all of the "holy wars" fought over the course of human civilization. A precise definition of holiness is elusive. Perhaps, therefore, the concept of *kdoshim*, with regard to definition, can be seen more in terms of commitment and dedication. God desires, so to speak, that we be committed to His program and goals for the Jewish people and for humanity generally.

This is also perhaps the understanding of the famous comment of Ramban on this subject that *kdoshim* demands that we do so with those areas of life that are permitted to us by the Torah. Even in our mundane pursuits in life, having apparently little to do with our state of being holy or pious, in those acts of life that are eminently permissible and sometimes even necessary for our overall welfare, we should still be committed to see the enhancement of God's program in those actions as well and not only in our performance of ritual and in the observance of commandments. Great flashes of spiritual uplift occur sporadically, even rarely, in one's lifetime. But commitment to God's Torah and to its values is an everyday possibility and requirement. And that is the crux of God's demand upon us to be *kdoshim*.

Sfat Emet in his commentary to a previous parsha (Shmini) remarks that one of the great manifestations of the *yetzer haraa* - the evil inclination that lurks within all humans - is the refusal to see God in the small and ordinary things in life. Nature is certainly natural but it is also Godly. The wonders of the world about us, the exquisite balance within our bodies that sustains life, even the mortality that is our fate, all bespeak of a connection to the Creator of all. Commitment is the tool of focus that allows us to overcome this *yetzer haraa*. Many times in life, people drift along aimlessly, eventually suffering great psychological discomfort from this state.

The Torah comes to make our lives purposeful and not aimless. One has myriad opportunities daily to do God's bidding and to advance the causes of goodness and virtue. This is true no matter what profession or occupation one is engaged in. It is true in retirement years as it was true in years of professional or business productivity. The commandment *kdoshim* applies to all times and circumstances in life. We read and hear of people during the Holocaust who refused to lose their humanity and remained committed in the worst of imaginable circumstances. The struggle to inculcate the Torah's value system into our daily lives is a challenging and ongoing one. But it is a

struggle that can be won if pursued with tenacity and commitment. That is certainly the challenge the Torah advances to us in requesting that be kdoshim.

Shabat shalom.

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