

COMMANDMENTS BRING US TO HOLINESS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The usual translation of the word *kedoshim* into English is "holy." As is also usual in translations from Hebrew into English, it does not carry with it the nuance that is present in the original Hebrew word. *Kedoshim* is not exclusively meant to represent holiness in the common usage of the word but it encompasses a dedication and devotion to a cause, an idea - to a faith itself. The Lord Himself, so to speak, describes His own Being as being not only holy but also as being dedicated - dedicated to fulfill His Will through the people of Israel, their history, behavior, events and destiny.

By describing Himself in this fashion, God reassures us that there is purpose to our lives and actions. He desires that we be dedicated throughout our lives, in all of our actions, to educate the world in His ways and value system. His dedication to us is oftentimes hidden and not clearly understood and appreciated but it is eternal and ongoing.

Our dedication to Him and His Torah must also be of that very nature - eternal and ongoing. Thus holiness is no longer to be viewed as pure piety, noble as that trait is, but rather also to be one of perseverance and tenacity, even stubbornness, if you will. The stiff-necked people are also the holy and dedicated people. This overriding sense of loyalty and tenacity of spirit and action is truly one of the basic hallmarks of Jewish history and life.

It is no coincidence that it is this parsha of the Torah that contains such a large number of commandments. For dedication and loyalty can only be translated into behavior by rote, ritual and varied actions. That is why the Mishna itself commented that the Lord wanted to prove Israel meritorious by providing such a large number and great variety of commandments to be fulfilled and performed. For only by such a regimen are human beings able to develop loyalty, purpose and a firm commitment to goodness and righteousness.

We are all creatures of habit and in developing good habits we become transformed into being good people. Good habits require drill and repetition, firmness and discipline. There are no shortcuts to holiness or dedication, no easy faith and convenient sense of religion. So the Jew is surrounded on all sides in one's daily life by God's commandments.

Everything in life becomes capable of holiness and dedication to God's nobility of existence. There really is nothing in life that is truly relegated to the mundane and unholy. It is the human attitude towards events and actions, the sense of purpose and dedication that accompanies one's actions which define the holiness and dedication of each and every action and facet of our existence. This

plethora of commandments is meant to enhance and accomplish this holy purpose and give eternal meaning to our lives and society. That is why the lord is justified in ordering us to be a just, holy and dedicated people.

Shabat shalom

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com