

KEDOSHIM: MORALITY IN DAILY LIFE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Although the entire gamut of Torah commandments is discussed in this week's Torah reading, it is obvious that the major emphasis is on the subject of sexual morality. It is almost impossible to discuss this subject in the current climate of politically correct Western liberalism. Even a discussion of this situation brings upon one the approbation of being bigoted and intolerant.

Yet in the long run of human history, the current acceptance of unrestricted sexual freedom has had many precedents. The power of the sexual drive in human beings is not a recent phenomenon. Psychiatrists and psychologists all recognize it as being one of the primary physical drives of all human behavior.

The Torah certainly recognized the primacy of this physical drive in our lives. In fact, the Torah devoted much detail and instruction in this matter in order to achieve a balanced and positive channeling of this drive, as it is the one that preserves human continuity and generational existence. The Talmud points out to us that without the existence of this drive, in nature generally, no hen would lay an egg and life as we know it would disappear.

Judaism never denied or even denigrated the necessary existence of the sexual drive in nature. It never preached celibacy; on the contrary it always promoted the concept of marriage and physical union between spouses. What it did oppose, and still opposes is the wanton "everything goes" attitude toward sexual behavior. Eventually all of society pays a heavy price for unrestricted sexual behavior.

The Torah speaks to us in terms of being kedoshim. This word is usually translated and used as a term for holiness. This is undoubtedly correct. But like most Hebrew words, the word also conveys a different and perhaps more subtle meaning. It also means "dedicated." In fact, one can say that the primary thrust of Judaism is that one should live a life dedicated to service of God and man, with vision and appreciation of the true meaning of life and its gifts.

Being dedicated in terms of Jewish life means valuing the concept of family, the necessity of the continuity of generations and the primacy of proper behavior regarding others particularly and in society generally. It is the dedication to these goals that translates itself into the idea of holiness. The lack of any code of sexual morality makes any such dedication impossible.

Unfortunately we live in an age where holiness is at best a curiosity and certainly not the goal of most people. But the Torah in its eternal vision demands from us holiness in all ages and societies.

The ancient classical world of Persia, Egypt, Greece and Rome, mighty as these empires were, nevertheless disappeared because of their inability to maintain a society based on paganism and sexual freedom.

No high sounding slogans about tolerance and acceptance of everything will eventually save Western society from such a fate as well. The Torah cautioned us regarding this inevitable rule of human society and we are bidden to maintain the traditional standards of Jewish behavior in this matter... no matter what.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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