

# THE COMMAND TO 'BE HOLY' WAS GIVEN IN A MASS GATHERING

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Rabbi Frand On Parshas Kedoshim

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### The Command To 'Be Holy' Was Given In A Mass Gathering

Parshas Kedoshim begins with the words "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel (kol adas bnei Yisrael) and say to them: 'Kedoshim Tihiyu - You shall be holy...' [Vayikra 19:1-2]. Rashi points out that the uncommon inclusion of the phrase "the entire assembly of the Children of Israel" in the standard formula "Speak to the Children of Israel..." teaches us that this mitzvah was specifically given in the presence of the entire assembly of Israel (b'hakhel).

There is a famous disagreement among the early commentaries as to exactly what is meant by the mitzvah "You shall be holy." Rashi interprets the mitzvah as one of abstinence -- "You shall be removed from arayos [forbidden sexual union] and from sin." The word "Kadosh" literally means: "separate." When we say "Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh" about Hashem, we are emphasizing his separateness and uniqueness. Thus, the meaning of "You shall be Kedoshim" is "You shall be separated - from forbidden sins."

The Ramban, in a famous argument with Rashi, says that "You shall be Kedoshim" has nothing to do with illicit sexual acts. Rather, Kedoshim Tihiyu [You shall be holy] is referring to perfectly permissible activities. The concept is "sanctify yourself by withdrawing from that which is permissible to you" (kadesh es atzmecha b'mutar lach). Without such self-limitation, the Ramban declares, a person can be a 'naval b'rshus haTorah' [a glutton 'sanctioned' by the Torah]. The level of

sanctity required by this pasuk [verse] is that achieved by restraining oneself somewhat from even those physical pleasures that the Torah permits.

The Chasam Sofer points out that whether we accept Rashi's interpretation or the Ramban's approach, the message of this mitzvah is one of abstinence. One could perhaps erroneously come to the conclusion that the only way to achieve this level of sanctity would be to lock oneself on the top of a mountain in a monastery. One could think that one should ideally have nothing to do with people; one should not get married and have nothing to do with the opposite gender at all. The Torah therefore makes clear that the "holiness" of a monk is not desirable. This section was specifically delivered "b'hakhel". Everyone was present - the men, the women, and the children.

One must be a Kadosh [a holy person], but one must be a Kadosh in the context of the congregation and the community. One must get married and one must raise children. One must play with his kids and spend time with his family and be a part of the community. The Torah wants the holiness of complete human beings.

The Kotzker Rebbe used to stress "MEN of holiness you shall be to Me" [Shemos 22:30]. "G-d is not looking for more angels." The Torah was not given to angels [Brachos 25b]. It was given to human beings who have wants and desires and are social animals. In that context we are commanded to develop holiness.

Therefore, specifically Kedoshim Tihiyu, of all mitzvos, was relayed in a mass public gathering to emphasize that despite our obligation to achieve holiness through a certain degree of abstinence it must be in the context of the community, together with one's wife, one's children, and one's neighbors.

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## The Torah Is Trying To Address Our Human Inclinations

The Torah commands "A man shall fear (i.e. - revere) his mother and father..." [Vayikra 19:3]. Rashi notes that regarding fear of parents, the mother precedes the father. However, in the Ten Commandments, where the mitzvah is honoring one's parents, the father precedes the mother. Rashi explains: "It is revealed before Him that son fears his father more than he fears his mother; therefore, the pasuk needed to emphasize fearing the mother. On the other hand, regarding honor the situation is reversed. The natural tendency is to feel a closer sense of love and attachment to a mother and consequently to honor her more than a father. In both cases the Torah found it necessary to stress that which is against a human being's natural inclination.

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz points out that there lies a much greater lesson in this famous teaching. The message here is that a person must reflect and ask himself: "What is my nature really about?" Because human nature is such that we fear our fathers more than our mothers, that is precisely why

we must work on fearing our mothers at least as much as our fathers. Since human nature is to honor one's mother more than one's father, that is precisely why we need to work on honoring our father ahead of our mother.

The message of this teaching of Chazal is to be alert for our natural tendencies. We need to introspect, to consider how the human psyche works, and to be on guard and compensate for any natural tendencies that might compromise our Torah obligations. If we will blindly follow our natural instincts, we will miss the message of the Torah.

The Torah relates to human beings with their predilections and with their character traits and desires, and zeroes in on their weaknesses, attempting to correct them. The message is not merely regarding fear and honor due one's parents. The message encompasses the entire scope of Torah law. The message is to think. Where am I going? What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? How does Torah address them?

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### **Baal HaTurim Comments on Juxtaposition of Mitzvos**

The Torah commands "You shall not cheat your fellow and you shall not rob; payment for the work of a hired worker shall not stay overnight with you until morning" [Vayikra 19:13]. The very next pasuk then teaches: "You shall not curse a deaf person..." [Vayikra 19:14].

The Baal HaTurim offers an interesting comment on the juxtaposition of the law against withholding salary and the law against cursing a person who cannot hear. The Baal HaTurim says: "Even if your employer withholds your salary, don't curse him. Rather bring a claim against him in court."

What do we do if our boss withholds our paycheck? What do we do if we are not paid on time? The Baal HaTurim advises what we should do under such circumstances: We should sue!

There is an old principle: "Don't get mad, get what is rightly due to you." The thing that should NOT be done is to get angry at him, to curse him, to throw darts at his picture. Such behavior is non-productive. It does not hurt the boss one iota to be cursed or to have darts thrown at his picture. It only hurts the employee who allows himself to be consumed by anger as a result of this occurrence. The employee will come home, kick his dog, yell at his children, and spend sleepless nights churning in aggravation.

In the meantime, the boss is sitting on his yacht drinking beer. As far as the employee's curses are concerned, the boss is "deaf": He does not hear them. The boss is cruising. The employee is stewing. This, the Baal HaTurim advises, is a totally non-productive situation for the employee. Let him not curse. Instead, let him bring his valid claim to Beis Din.

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This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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