

WHY IS THIS PARSHA DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER PARSHIOS?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Kedoshim

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These dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #95, The Mezonos Roll: Does It Exist? Good Shabbos!

"And G-d spoke to Moses saying: 'Speak to the entire Community of Israel and tell them You must be Holy, for I the L-rd your G-d am Holy.'" [Vayikra 19:1-2]

The Medrash comments on this pasuk that it was said "be'Hakhel," namely, it was said to all the Jewish people together. In contrast, most of the Torah was taught to Moshe, who taught it to Aharon who taught to his sons, who taught to the Elders, etc., etc. However, Moshe taught this parsha in everyone's presence.

Why is this parsha different? The Medrash answers because most of the fundamentals of Torah are dependent on this portion, called "Kedoshim Teheyu -- You shall be Holy."

The simple interpretation of this Medrash is that since there are so many important laws that are contained in this section, it was said in the presence of everyone.

Perhaps, however, the Medrash means something else. Perhaps it means that the specific command 'You shall be Holy' is so important, and has so many of the fundamentals of Torah dependent upon it, that this Mitzvah itself was given publicly.

According to the Ramba"n, this Mitzvah teaches us how to live and act as Jews. As the Ramba"n explains, if it would not be for this Mitzvah, a person could conceivably be a "naval b'irshus haTorah," meaning, he could be an observant Jew, and simultaneously a glutton. He could live an obscene life within the parameters of the Torah. He could eat as much as he wants; he could indulge in all the physical pleasures of life; and it might all be 'glatt kosher.'

If not for this Mitzvah, such a person could be called a Tzadik [righteous person]. However, the Torah tells us, "You shall be Holy" -- you need to abstain. You need to act with abstinence, with restraint, with holiness. Do not indulge. Do not be a glutton. That is what the Mitzvah of Kedoshim Teheyu is all about. It is so vital that it needed to be said to the entire nation together.

The Shemen HaTov explains that a person cannot be Holy unto himself. Even though this Mitzvah is a Mitzvah on the individual, the individual needs society's help. If one lives in a society which is indulgent, it becomes very difficult for that individual to remain a 'Kadosh' [holy person].

In order to achieve "You shall be holy," the cooperation of one's family, of one's city and one's nation is required. The parsha needed to be given to everyone together. When everyone is involved in conspicuous indulgence, it becomes almost impossible for the individual to act with restraint.

We see this very clearly in the society in which we live today. We see rampant hedonism today. We are surrounded by a society that emphasizes gratifying their every whim and wish instantly. We live in a society that does not know what kedusha [holiness] is about. The only way we can personally achieve this mitzvah of "You shall be holy," is if we not only work on ourselves, but we elevate and try to live among people who also share the ideal of Kedoshim Teheyu.

However, it must begin with the individual. As the Chassidic Rebbe, Reb Bunim of Pshis'cha is quoted as having said, when he was young he thought he could change the entire world. As he got older, he saw he could not change the entire world, but at least he could change his city. As time went on, he saw that even that was beyond his grasp, but he said "I'll at least change my neighborhood." When he saw that that was not working, he said "I'll at least try to change my family." When he saw that that too failed, he said, "I'll have to try to only change myself."

But once he succeeded in changing himself, then he saw that his family was different, his neighborhood was different, his city was different, and in a sense, the entire world was different.

That is how it is with this Mitzvah of "Kedoshim Tiheyu." We cannot go it alone. We need to work on ourselves, and then our families, and then our neighborhoods, and then our societies.

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

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