

PARSHAS KEDOSHIM

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

It is written, 'Speak to the entire community of Bnei Yisrael' (Vayikra 19; 2). 'These words in Vayikrah were said bekahal' -Rashi. 'This is because most of the principal things of Torah are presented here' (Sifrah).

The great Admor Menachem Mendel of Kotsk asked how ordinary people could be holy. He answered that as the verse was said to Klal Yisrael, we can be holy through our belonging to the holy nation of Israel. The greater the identification of the individual with that Klal, the greater the holiness that person can achieve. The converse is also so, so that the more one distances oneself from Klal Yisrael, the weaker is ones kedushah.

This is shown by the period of Serfirat H'Omer, which precedes Shavuot and Matan Torah. The word 'omer' is connected to gathering that which is separate, disparate and individual, together into one unit or one group. It was only the ingathering of all the Jews that made it possible for them to receive the Torah. They camped before Har Sinai as one person, in order to be a Holy Nation and a Mamlechet Kohanim. We learn from the Midrash that if one of them would have been missing, it would have been impossible to give Israel the Torah. Sforno explains the verse 'And the people all answered Moshe together, to teach us that all of us together complete that which was expected'. That is why these days of Sefirah obligate each and every one of us to be scrupulous in their relationship to others and to separate ourselves from all types of jealousy and hatred. Rather, we should concentrate on filling our hearts with Ahavat Yisrael.

This is like the 248 positive mitzvot which sanctify the 248 organs of the body. If one of the mitzvot is missing, it's as though one of the organs of the body are not included in the sanctity. Although, there are some mitzvot that do not apply in our days, while others only apply to Kohanim or to a king, and yet others only at certain times, Klal Yisrael is able to weld all into a unity

[The Master, Simcha Bunem, of Physcha was asked why we were given so many mitzvot. It would have been better if we would have been given a few mitzvot which we would keep with greater intensity and devotion. He answered that Reuven is able to keep some mitzvot which others can not keep; Shimon is able to keep yet others, while Levi yet others. So, together Israel would keep all the many mitvot.]

'Because I the Lord your G-d am Holy' (Vayikrah 19:1)

In Torat Kohanim it is written: 'You shall be Holy, be separate'. There is a difference between one

who is pure and one who is holy, and the Torah commanded us to be holy. The pure people are those who separate themselves from evil actions and wrongdoing, whereas 'holy' means to disregard anything which is wrong and evil. That is why our holiness is to sanctify even those actions and things that are permitted to us.

This distinction between 'pure' and 'holy' is the distinction between the sanctification of actions and the sanctification of thought. Through the sanctification of thought one becomes holy. However, the Admor Menachem Mendel of Kotzk questioned how mortals, born of man and woman, can achieve holiness, as while they can prevent themselves from doing impure actions, it is almost impossible for them to remove their thoughts from evil and wrongdoing. He answered that our verse tells us that this can be done, because G-d is Holy. Not only is it an obligation on us to be Holy, but it is also a promise that if we will consecrate ourselves to imitate Him in all our thoughts and actions, then we too can be Holy.

'Everyday the Kadosh Barukh Hu is crowned with three Holinesses. What does He do? One He places on His head and the other two He places on the head of Israel '(Midrash Rabbah, Vayikrah chapter 24) The Targum translates the thrice mentioned Kadosh (Isaiah 6:3) as 'Holy in the most exalted heavens, the dwelling place of His Presence, Holy on earth the product of His strength and Holy for ever and ever'. We need to understand what new insight the Targum gave us by adding 'the product of His strength'. We can understand this if we examine the gevurot which we say in the Shemoneh Esrei. They describe how G-d is busy in very material and mundane things like raising the fallen ones, curing the sick, and freeing the prisoners. We could imagine that it is not fitting for G-d, who is so holy, to busy himself with such mundane and material affairs. However, in our prayers, these gevurot are followed by Ha El HaKadosh; the holy G-d. From this we learn that even when He is engaged in the mundane and material, He remains Holy. Israel, too, although engaged in things of this world and while they busy themselves with the material and mundane, they remain holy. For that reason, the Targum added 'The product of His strength'.

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