

“You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d.” (19:2)

The *Sifri* makes what seems to be an ambiguous statement in interpreting this *pasuk*. Hashem says *Yachol kamoni*, “Perhaps, you think that you can be holy like Me.” Therefore, the Torah adds, *Ani Hashem*, “I am Hashem; My *kedushah*, holiness, is greater than yours.” This statement begs elucidation. Can one conceive that man could even remotely aspire to a *kedushah* equivalent to that of Hashem? What, then, is the meaning of *Yachol kamoni*?

Horav Yosef Cohen, z.l., cites his father-in-law, *Horav Tzvi Pesach Frank, z.l.*, who explains that this *pasuk* refers to a *pasuk* in the previous *parsha*, 16:16, where the Torah says that the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, “dwells with them amid their contamination.” The *Shechinah* reposes in *Klal Yisrael*, despite their spiritual contamination. This is why the *Mishkan* provides atonement for *Klal Yisrael*’s sins, since the essence of the *Shechinah*’s holiness never leaves the Sanctuary. *Rav Frank* explains that perhaps the Jew might think *Yachol kamoni*: Just as Hashem resides among the spiritually defiled, so, too, can I remain among those who have serious spiritual shortcomings, who have contaminated their spiritual essence and distanced themselves from Judaism. If Hashem does it, why can I not do the same? Therefore, he is told, “*Ani Hashem*”: My *kedushah* transcends your *kedushah*. Only I can repose among the spiritually profaned.

Rav Cohen cites an incident that occurred concerning the *Rebbe Reb Heshel, z.l.* He once arrived in a city where two wealthy men resided, each of whom requested that the *Rebbe* stay with him. One was a great Torah scholar, but regrettably his erudition went to his head, rendering him very arrogant. The other was a fine person, but regrettably he was not very meticulous in his *mitzvah* observance. The *Rebbe* chose to stay with this man. When questioned regarding his choice, he explained that the sinner had the advantage of still retaining Hashem in his presence. Hashem says the *Shechinah* still reposes among the spiritually defiled. “If Hashem can stay with him – so could I,” said the *Rebbe*. “On the other hand, regarding haughtiness, Hashem says, ‘I and he cannot live together.’ If Hashem will not stay with him, how can I?”

Rav Cohen is careful to emphasize that this story is to be viewed purely from a homiletic perspective, since *halachically* – as mentioned before – **only** Hashem continues to stay with those who have strayed spiritually – man does not. Man must protect himself and reside only in a place where he is among those whose lifestyles are spiritually strong.