

Speak to the Bnei Yisroel and say to them I am Hashem your G-d. (18:2)

These three words, ofhekt 's hbt "*I am Hashem your G-d,*" preface the chapter which relates the laws of morality. The primary objective of the laws contained in *Sefer Vayikra* is to raise *Am Yisrael* to the spiritual level of a "*kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" Hashem had already mandated laws regarding holiness in the ritual service, man's diet, and spiritual purity. In this chapter, He continued with laws dealing with moral purity.

Horav Eli Munk, z.l., notes that moral legislation, like other types of legal directives, is not based upon social order, physical hygiene, or the instinct for self-preservation. These decrees are presented purely as the will of Hashem. In this spirit, the words, "*I am Hashem your G-d,*" serve as the imprimatur to the beginning and end of the chapter. These words constitute the ultimate justification for the fundamental dictates of moral purity.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l., explains that marital legislation originated in the *mitzvah* of *ucru urp - be fruitful and multiply.* Even though our natural physical inclinations would engender the fulfillment of this command, it is nonetheless essential to express it as a Divine command. Marriage is thereby revealed to be far more than a simple sanctification of our instincts. It is elevated to the degree of a national institution, which is far more holy than the mere expression of physical drives. Hashem has commanded us to contribute to the moral development of His world. The guidelines for the successful accomplishment of this task are spelled out by Hashem in this *parsha*.

The *Torah* calls upon *Bnei Yisrael* to divorce themselves from the abominable practices of Egypt and Canaan. *Am Yisrael* receives its most noble distinction specifically in the area of morality. The citizens of the greatest civilization of those times lived completely unrestrained in areas of moral behavior. Indeed, they viewed discipline as an intolerable anathema to freedom of natural expression. For the first time, man was mandated to submit his natural instinct to a higher moral discipline. This discipline serves to consecrate the physical by elevating it to a sublime standard. Progressive spiritualization of the physical is the essence of *kedushah*, holiness.