

And men of a holy calling shall you be to Me. (22:30)

The Torah does not say *anashim kedoshim*, holy men; rather, it says *anshei kodesh*, men of a holy calling. Not all men can achieve the apex of *kedushah*, holiness, but all men can – and should – live as individuals who are charged with a Heavenly mission to achieve holiness. Our goal must be to become holy. *Kedoshim tiyehu*, “Be holy!” would then be interpreted: as strive for holiness; imbue your life with *kedushah*; attempt to reach the level whereby you are sanctified. Demanding personal holiness might be difficult for the individual. Expecting everyone to strive for holiness, to focus on a life of *kedushah*, should be standard fare for a Jew.

This means that we must imbue every activity – no matter how mundane – with sanctity. We should not judge an individual’s success at consecrating himself (since this is often a subjective opinion), but a standard of striving should be accessible across the board. A Jew strives for *Kedushah*. The question is: How do we define *kedushah*?

In an article on Orthodoxy in America, Rabbi Emanuel Feldman distinguishes between the Jew who is observant and his brother who is also religious. Wait – is that not the same thing? Absolutely not! A difference exists between going through the rote of observance and advancing to a level of spirituality plus being meticulous in observing the laws of *bein adam lachaveiro*, between man and his fellowman. There is also the attitude of *hatznea leches*, maintaining a modest lifestyle, which stands in stark contrast to the ostentatious and lavish parties many of our *simchos*, which at one time had been religious affairs, have now become.

One might be observant, but that is insufficient, since the Torah demands that we strive to become *anshei kodesh*. The *Navi Michah* (6:8) admonishes us to live a life of restrained, modesty and understatement. This leads to *kedushah*. We should ask ourselves whether our lifestyle fits into these guidelines. We judge *frumkeit* by the color of one’s shirt, suit and *yarmulke*. It goes without saying that a hat is mandatory. *Lashon hora* classes and reminders are everywhere, but it seems that humility – quiet *chesed* for those who really are in need, giving *tzedakah* even if we are not honored or receive a spread in the paper – has fallen by the wayside. *Davening* with *kavanah*, not talking in *shul*, are other areas where observance and religion part ways. Certainly, these musings apply only to an insignificant minority who cannot be faulted for falling prey to physicality and materialism at the expense of spirituality. The *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, is very powerful, and, while it cannot ensnare one to renege on his observance, he will suffice and call it a “win” if he can impugn one’s commitment to religion.

I present here two vignettes which are meaningful to me. We live in a time when materialism plays a large role in everything we do – even in our religious endeavor. We celebrate with opulence; our *avodas Hashem*, religious service, is bolstered by a show of our material substance – all for a good reason, of course, but, nonetheless, the profusion of affluence is everywhere. The days of having a simple *Tallis*, a plain velvet *Tefillin* bag, are long gone. Variations of *Talleisim*, the thickness of the wool, the leather and suede *Tefillin* bags, are so in vogue that one feels sorry for the deprived *bar-*

mitzvah bachur who does not have a leather *Tefillin* bag. Obviously, something is missing: our concern for *bona fide*, sincere, observance of the *mitzvah* without all of the accompanying accouterments.

I remember years ago, my father had a plain weekday *Tallis*. My father's fifty-second *yahrzeit* is this week, which serves the reader with an idea of the time frame. It was in the mid-fifties, and my father had a white, thin, material (I think it was cotton) *Tallis* (of course, the *tzitzis* were wool), and this *Tallis* was his pride and joy. He probably could not have afforded to purchase another *Tallis*, but I always wondered why it was so special to him. I asked – he replied. When the American army liberated Auschwitz, the *Vaad Hatzalah* came in with them and sought to address, not only the physical needs of the survivors, but also their spiritual needs. For many, it was not only six years of brutal unimaginable torture, but also six years of no *Tallis*, *Tefillin* and *sefarim* from which to learn. When my father was handed a *Tallis*, he felt as if his life had been returned to him. He treasured that *Tallis* and wore it until it fell apart. Cotton does not last as long as wool. He – like so many European Jews of “old” – had a different perspective on *tashmishei kedushah*. They felt the *kedushah* inherent in the religious articles.

Second, shortly after my wedding, I was walking down Sixteenth Avenue in Boro Park on my way to *shul*. I was carrying my large *Tallis* bag with *Tefillin* (two pair) and a *siddur* with me, holding the bag by its top. It was more convenient to carry it in such a manner. Suddenly, from behind me, I heard a voice. I turned around and saw an elderly *chassidishe yid* (European) who called out to me, “*Yinger man, dos is nisht a zak potatoes!* Young man, you are not carrying a sack of potatoes!” He motioned for me to raise the *Tallis* bag and carry it next to my chest, giving it the respect it deserved. *Anshei kodesh*. To him and so many like him, it was not just observance. It was religion.

These vignettes might come across as musings, but, if one reader will fold his *Tallis* with greater respect or carry his bag as if they were not a bag of potatoes, relaying these thoughts will be well worth it.