

## **You shall be holy, for holy am I. (19:2)**

For a Jew, being “good” is insufficient. We are to be a holy people, holy to Hashem, because He is the Source of holiness. It would make sense that His nation is expected to strive to be G-d-like. The choice of words, *ki kadosh Ani*, “For holy am I,” begs elucidation. No human being, regardless of his spiritual stature, can aspire to achieve such holiness. In the *sefer Sifsei Tzaddikim*, the author offers an insightful exposition based on an incident that he heard from *Horav Aharon Klivaner, zl (a maggid)*. When Rav Aharon was a youth studying in the *yeshivah* in Prague, his fame as a Torah scholar spread throughout the area. Outside of Prague, in a small village, there lived a wealthy man whose daughter had reached marriageable age. Her father wanted a “top” *yeshivah* student for her. He traveled to the *yeshivah* in Prague and implored the *Rosh Yeshivah* to provide him with such a student.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* promptly introduced the man to *Rav Aharon*. Impressed with the young man, but totally taken aback by his abject poverty (his clothes were torn, his feet protruded from his shoes, etc.), the wealthy man took the young man shopping to purchase an entire wardrobe for him, befitting a man of means. The young couple married, and the proud father-in-law addressed whatever financial issues arose. At first, *Rav Aharon* strictly adhered to his daily schedule of studies. In due time, however, he fell prey to the wealth and material pleasures that he previously could not even have dreamed about. His in-laws became visibly upset upon seeing their prize son-in-law depart from the world of Torah erudition in which he had risen so high. Whenever his father-in-law would call him to task for his apparent digression from Torah study, he would reply that even if he were to do absolutely nothing for the next twenty years, he would still be intellectually far beyond anyone in the town.

One day, a *Rav* visited the community, and *Rav Aharon's* father-in-law asked the *Rav* to have a few words with his errant son-in-law. The *Rav* spoke to him and received the same response: “I am still way ahead of anyone in town.” The *Rav* was not to be so cavalierly ignored. He said, “This is all good and well, as long as you remain in this town. What will you do if your parents-in-law become impatient and send you packing? Imagine arriving in Prague, at your old *yeshivah*, wearing the old, worn out clothing with which you left. Can you begin to conceive your shame when your friends speak with you in learning and you stand there unerudite and clueless?”

*Rav Aharon* attested to the impact these sincere, penetrating words had on him. He immediately returned to his Torah studies, rising through the ranks, achieving the spiritual potential that was expected of him. The *Sifsei Tzaddikim* applies this vignette toward explaining the words, *ki kadosh Ani*. When a Jew is asked why he is not growing in sanctity, his rejoinder might be, “Well, I am so far ahead of the *goyim*, gentiles. Even if I would defer to my *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, I would still be way beyond them.” This might be a suitable reply in *Olam Hazeah*, This World. What will this “smart” man say when he comes before Hashem? When his *neshamah tehorah*, pure soul, returns to its Source and stands before the Source of all *kedushah*? The embarrassment will be beyond anything one can imagine: “‘For holy am I.’ It is before Me that you will one day stand. Do not

forget that.”