

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

Regardless of how we translate *kedushah*, holiness, it clearly represents a state of being which is above and beyond the usual. One may be good – wonderful – virtuous, whatever other adjective that comes to mind, but it does not mean that he is holy. It represents the next step. Once one has achieved all of the other appellations which define upstanding behavior – then there is *kedushah*, holiness. Interestingly, *Kedoshim tiheyu*, “You shall be holy,” is a *mitzvah* which is addressed to all of *Klal Yisrael* – not just a select few. Every Jew is enjoined to achieve a level of holiness – not just good – but holy! How are we to define the concept of *kedushah* which applies to all Jews?

To understand the concept of holiness, we must address its Source. Hashem says *Kedoshim tiheyu ki kadosh Ani* – “Be holy, because I am holy.” Hashem is the Source of *kedushah*. Thus, when one connects with Hashem, the closer he becomes to the Source of *kedushah*, he becomes holy. Having said this, we deduce that holiness is a state of spiritual or transcendent goodness, in which one who has achieved the requisite levels of virtue and uprightness is now unrestricted by the limitations imposed by the physical dimension. His goodness soars beyond the here and now. He is on a completely different plane. Perhaps this is why so much of our religious activity is focused on its transmission to the next generation. We believe in perpetuation, because our relationship is with Hashem, Who is eternal. We do not think only in terms of the present, we are focused on the future, because our religion is holy, and holiness is forever.

The Jewish People have always understood that it is not enough to be good – one must be holy. Holiness means unrestricted goodness, unlimited by time and place, and given to perpetuation. Thus, parents have sacrificed to inculcate Jewish values and tradition into the minds and hearts of their children, for if there is no future, then there is no present. The following episode, quoted by Rav Moshe Toledano, underscores this idea.

One night, in the summer of 2011, a funeral took place in Yerushalayim. An elderly Jew, who, for the last decade of his life had lived with excruciating pain, had passed away. Among the participants was *Horav Yechiel Michel Stern, Shlita, Rav of Shechunos Ezras Torah*, in Yerushalayim. In his eulogy he related the following story. In 1924, the great leader of European Jewry, *Rav of Kovno*, and author of the celebrated *Dvar Avraham*, **Horav Avraham Duber Kahane Shapiro, zl**, visited America. During his stay, a young couple came before him with a domestic “dispute.” Obviously, this couple felt that the issue over which they were divided was important enough to take up this great *gaon’s* time. The *Kovner Rav* was an undisputed scholar whose Torah erudition was unparalleled. Every minute of his day was meticulously devoted to Torah study and affairs of the *klal*, general community. Yet, this couple felt that their dispute was worthy of his input and mediation.

What was the point of contention between them? The husband claimed that his wife fasted every Monday and Thursday – a fast which is reserved for the most righteous. While he was impressed with his wife’s piety, he was concerned that the fasting would be detrimental to her health. The

wife did not deny his allegations. She fasted twice weekly, and she would continue to do so. Her rationale was: At present, she was in the fifth month of her pregnancy. She felt that raising a child in the spiritually deficient environment of America of those days was very difficult. She felt that she needed every bit of protection that she could garner for her unborn child.

The *Kovner Rav* was greatly impressed by the piety and spiritual innocence of this woman. He said, "Granted, your concerns are far from baseless. Yet, a pregnant woman must eat." Fasting may be detrimental to her health and to the health of her baby. He encouraged her to put an end to her self-deprivation.

The woman listened respectfully to the *Rav*, then said that, while she understood that, as a *Rav*, he was correct in his decision, as the future mother of a child to be raised in America, she would follow her prerogative of fasting to protect her child. The *Kovner Rav* listened to what she had to say and was greatly impressed with her devotion. He, therefore, offered a compromise: She should cease fasting, and he would bless the unborn infant that, in his mother's merit, he would grow up to be an observant, committed Jew, who would be a *nachas*, spiritual satisfaction, to his parents. The parents were overjoyed with the *Rav's* assurance, and they left with the hope that their child would be a credit to his people.

Rav Stern concluded his eulogy with the following: "Eighty six and one half years have passed since that fateful day that the *Kovner Rav* gave his blessing to that young couple. Before us lies the deceased, *Rav Yisrael Shimon Stern*, who was the child born of that blessing. This child was born and raised in America in an era when it was not much more than a spiritual wasteland. It was the blessing of the *gadol hador* to a mother who was willing to sacrifice her very health so that her child would grow up a *ben Torah*.

Rav Yisrael Shimon was a close neighbor and confidante of *Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach*. His father, *Rav David Zussman*, was the *Menahel Ruchani*, spiritual guide, of *Mesivta Torah Vodaath*. His entire life was devoted to Torah and *chesed*. He established a glorious Torah home that exemplifies his devotion to Torah and *mitzvos*. The last decade of his life was filled with excruciating pain. His legs could not carry him, and the open wounds were a constant source of infection. Yet, he never raised his voice in complaint. His face manifested a perpetual smile, because he felt that it was forbidden to complain. Whatever Hashem doles out to a person, he must accept with gratitude and joy. This was the product of America!

I think his mother's concern for the future, her anxiety concerning the future, exemplified the meaning of holiness. It was not enough for her alone to be observant. Her son had to be observant! For her present to have any meaning, her future and the future of her progeny had to be assured.