

You shall be holy, for I, G-d, your G-d, are holy. (19:2)

A Jew must achieve a spiritual plateau that towers above pious, virtuous, good, saintly and other such wonderful adjectives. A Jew must strive for *kedushah*, sanctity, holiness. In *Parashas Kedoshim*, the Torah outlines a small number of laws which define the character of Jewish life. These are the fundamentals for the social ordinances that govern a communal Jewish life under Hashem: morality; justice; selflessness; and brotherly love.

In the previous *parsha*, *Acharei Mos*, the Torah detailed the negatives, the immoral behavior that was a way of life for the Canaanites, a way of life that is strictly forbidden to the Holy Nation. The present *parsha* calls attention to a number of the positives, behavior to which a Jew should adhere. We may note that the “positives” follow the moral “negatives,” to teach us that only a society established and maintained upon the foundation of a morally-pure life can function as virtuous and just. One who is bereft of the moral posture of purity will be neither virtuous nor just.

Moral purity begins at home in the way in which a child is raised. The moral values imparted to a child become his or her foundation for life. Indeed, **Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl**, observes that the present *parsha*, *Kedoshim tiheyu*, begins with the commandment to honor one’s father and mother, which happens to be the cornerstone of all society and all human civilization. Interestingly, with regard to reverence, the mother is mentioned before the father. *Rav Hirsch* explains that, only when a man has taken for himself the proper wife in a Divinely-sanctioned marriage, will the children have a true mother, which is the first prerequisite for moral and spiritual humanness. When parents “have it together,” there is hope that such conditions can produce Jewish relationships between children and parents, which is the basis of Jewish life. In such a situation, children will flourish before G-d, and the social virtues required for a Torah society will be effectively nurtured from the cradle on.

The commentators grapple with the exact definition of *kedushah*. The consensus of opinion to which they all agree is that *kedushah* results when a morally-conforming human being maintains complete dominion over all of his energies and inclinations and over the various enticements that the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, throws at him. Furthermore, he does not simply stunt, neglect, or suppress these energies and inclinations, but rather, he harnesses them to serve Hashem. No impulse, potential or inclination, from the most spiritual to the most sensual, is in and of itself inherently good or bad. Each is given to us for the purpose of serving Hashem. Each can be employed for a positive purpose. The *kadosh* has the ability to conquer, prevail and dominate over these tendencies and mobilize them for positive, spiritual growth.

How does man gain mastery over his inclinations? Surely, moral resolve is not to be tested in the sphere of the forbidden – where any slip will result in disaster. It is in the area of permissibility that one must initiate and exercise his powers of self-restraint, in conduct that is morally permitted, but if overdone, can have serious consequences. This is how one achieves personal sanctity.

While most of the laws in this *parsha* fit into the framework of social ordinances, some – like *Shabbos*, idol worship, and the laws concerning *korbanos*, sacrifices – might be included as a result of their identification with *kedushah*. It is for this reason that the prohibitions concerning crossbreeding and wearing mixtures of wool and linen, which are essentially *chukim*, *mitzvos* whose rationale eludes us, seem out of place. How are *shatnez*, mixture of wool and linen, crossbreeding animals, and planting mixed species linked with *Kedoshim tiheyu*?

I was fortunate to discover a profound exposition from the *Orzover Rebbe*, zl, **Horav Yechiel HaLevi Epstein**, which sheds light on our query. In his commentary to *Devarim* 22:9, on the *pasuk* *Lo sizra kilayim*, “You shall not sow your fields with a mixture,” the *Ozrover* cites the *Tikunei Zohar* that says: “We only sow the same specie, because the vineyard of Hashem is the Jewish People. This is why our sages devised the text of *Havdalah*, the prayer recited when *Shabbos* ends and the work week is about to begin. We address the various sorts of separation between the entities, such as: *mikodesh l’chol* from holy to profane/mundane; *ohr l’choshech*, light to darkness; *Yisrael l’amim*, Jew to gentile. These mixtures cannot integrate with one another.”

The above teaches us that *kilayim*, prohibited admixtures, are not limited to seeds and fabrics. They allude to the inexorable separation that exists between holy and profane; Jew and gentile. *Klal Yisrael* is considered *Kerem Hashem*, the Almighty’s vineyard, and one who mingles the non-Jew with the Jew sows *kilayim* in Hashem’s vineyard.

Furthermore, light and darkness are two entities that are clearly distinguishable from one another; the dissimilarity between the two is blatant and unquestionable. We must remember, declares the *Ozrover*, that the disparity between Jew and gentile is no different. We just are unable to perceive it with our eyes of flesh and blood. The discrepancy between *kodesh* and *chol* is similar; just because we do not see the difference with our human eyes does not mean it does not exist. One does not have to perceive the actual contrast. It is enough to know that it exists. We now understand why the Torah includes the laws concerning admixture in the *parsha* which addresses *kedushas Yisrael*, the sanctity of the Jew. It is not only relevant concerning the significance of maintaining social justice and adhering to a strong moral compass. It is important to the acknowledgement and preservation of the sanctity which we as Jews harbor within us. This can only be realized by maintaining a strict sense of self-sufficiency, recognizing our self-worth and our distinctiveness. We cannot run from the world. We do not live in a ghetto. If we view ourselves in the proper light, however, we will not gravitate to what is out there, because we recognize that we function above and beyond whatever “they” have to offer us.

The inherent *kedushah* which exists within the essence of each and every Jew is real and is manifest during instances in his life when one would least expect it. Some individuals view the Jewish people through the eyes of history as its victims. We have suffered daily for over a thousand years. Nary a day has gone by that a Jew in some area of the world has not been persecuted, and even killed. To call us victims would be condescending. We should view ourselves as a nation of survivors, having outlived and out-achieved all of our persecutors.

After citing the *Tikunei Zohar* that distinguishes between Jew and gentile with regard to the very essence of each, it is important and necessary to underscore that, when a gentile commits to Judaism, he becomes a full-fledged *Yehudi* with the inherent *kedushas Yisrael* that accompanies it. This is one of the many beautiful aspects of our religion. We are not quick to accept everyone, but one who sincerely commits and is accepted, becomes one of us. Let me share the following vignette, related by *Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtel*.

A certain *ger*, convert, from the town of Topol, insisted on accompanying his fellow Jews when they were sent off to the death camps in Poland. He was imprisoned in Zholina's detention camp to await the arrival of the deportation train. A few Slovakian collaborators snuck into camp and sought him out. "We are offering you a chance to escape," they said to him. "Come back home with us. You are not a Jew as far as we are concerned. You are one of us. Take your family and leave. We will protect you."

Avraham Klein shouted into the faces of his "rescuers," "I am a Jew! I am just like all of the other Jews. I am going with them to Poland, and I will share the same fate as my brothers. Neither you nor anyone else like you will send me home. Only G-d Himself can do that." This was his powerful reply.

Avraham Klein was born in Piestany, and he converted to Judaism in Munkacs. Indeed, the *Munkacer Rebbe* himself was his *mohel*, circumcised him. He eventually married a wonderful, righteous woman, and together they raised several pious sons who studied Torah in *yeshivos*. Now that he was about to embark on the expulsion train, he turned to his fellow Jews and said, "You think it is good to be a Jew only when things are going well for the Jews. This is not so. Someone who is prepared to suffer together with suffering Jews – he is someone who is called a Jew. I am going with you happily to Poland, for this is the will of the *Heilige Bashefer*, Holy Creator."

He continued his little speech by comparing Jewish suffering to the complications that often arise following surgery: "Even if the actual procedure has gone well, at times, complications set in afterwards. One must have a strong heart, filled with faith in the Almighty, to survive the aftermath of surgery. If an individual is not resolute in his faith in Hashem, if his heart is not strongly aligned with G-d, he will go under, Heaven forbid, in times of trouble."