

## Speak to the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael, and say to them: “You shall be holy, for holy am I.” (19:2)

*Sefer Vayikra* is called *Toras Kohanim*, the Laws of *Kohanim*. Veritably, only the first few *parshiyos* of *Sefer Vayikra* address the Priestly service and obligations. Why, then, is the entire book under the rubric of *Toras Kohanim*? The question is especially germane with regard to *Parashas Kedoshim* which addresses the normal gamut of *mitzvos* that applies to all Jews, who, through the observance of these *mitzvos*, sanctify and maintain the *kedushah* of the entire nation. *Horav Simcha Wasserman, zl*, explains that, just as the *Kohanim* are to be the spiritual exemplars of the Jewish nation, so, too, should the Jewish nation serve as the spiritual prototype, the lodestar, for the world to emulate.

For a Jew, *kedushah* is more than a moral compass and a sense of purpose. It is an identity. Hashem charged us with being a *mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh*, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This leads to a more meaningful and enriching life – which promotes positive values, compassion and a sense of connectivity with something greater than oneself. It is, however, not a personal decision: Should I be holy or not? It is not a decision. It is a Divine mandate. As Hashem is holy – we, His People, must strive to be holy. It is who we are. Indeed, all the *mitzvos* included in the *parshiyos* of *Vayikra* exist to sanctify us. We must remember: We are not they; we do not live like they do – we do not act like they do. We live by a different set of rules. Our goal is to attach ourselves to Hashem. It is not about being observant or Orthodox. It is about being holy.

A person who lives a life of sanctity – i.e., connected to Hashem – has a different status than typical human beings. Books could be filled with stories about our *gedolei Yisrael* whose lives were devoted to elevating their level of *kedushah*. This resulted in their being blessed with otherworldly powers. The *Maharasha*, *Horav Shmuel HaLevi Idelis, zl*, was a scholar whose brilliance was matched by his extraordinary piety. He established a *yeshivah* in Posen. (He was supported by his mother-in-law, Edel; hence, he took her name Idelis in recognition of her support.) He later became *Rav* and *Rosh Yeshivah* in Lublin until he moved to Ostroh in western Ukraine, where he lived until his death. He was buried in the cemetery in Ostroh. I write this short bio because the story is about his burial in Ostroh.

The Jewish community of Ostroh suffered heavily from its gentile population. These anti-Semites did whatever they could to make the lives of its Jewish citizens miserable. One of the more oppressive decrees leveled at the Jewish community was that, when a Jew died, his coffin had to be carried past the community church, during which time the priests and their sympathizers would come out of the church, hurl curses at the Jews, and even resort to physical blows. These priests were proficient in the powers of impurity and blackmail, and they employed their impure skills to inject thoughts of idol worship into the minds of the hapless Jews. Not only did they succeed in terrorizing the Jews, but they also caused a terrible dishonor to the deceased – in addition to the *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name.

When the life of the *Maharasha* was nearing its culmination, the *Rav* instructed that the *Chevra Kaddisha*, members of the Jewish burial society, place the *sefarim* he had written (*Chidushei Halachos v'Chidushei Aggados*) upon his *mitah*, the “stretcher” on which they were to transport his body. When they reached the church, they were to stop the procession and place his body on the ground. The funeral cortege included just about every member of the Jewish community. When it reached the church, they placed the *mitah* on the ground and moved aside. Suddenly, the deceased sat up and began to learn from his *sefarim* – as if he were alive!

The priests were in an utter state of shock, seeing a corpse arise and study Torah. They turned around and saw, to their horror, that the church was slowly sinking into the ground – deeper and deeper, until it was completely swallowed up. At that moment, the priests ran for their lives, perceiving that they had just witnessed a miracle of epic proportion. This demonstrates the extraordinary powers of a Jew who adheres to the Torah.