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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Are there four questions, or is it just one question? We don't need to look that closely to realize that it's one four-part question; "why is this night different than all other nights?" followed by four examples of how it is different than other nights (although my 5 year old daughter thought it was one question with four separate answers as to how "this night is different"). How do we answer this four-part question? Do we address each of the parts and explain why we do these things differently at the Seder, or do we just address the overall question of why the Seder night is different?

If mentioning the four differences is only a vehicle to call attention to the fact that some things we do are indicative of a state of poverty and our being tread upon (such as eating "poor-man's bread" and bitter herbs) while others indicate nobility (i.e. dipping and reclining), we never really finish giving the answer, relying instead on the ability of the questioner to understand that by relating our history we are recounting our transition from servitude to freedom. We do eventually explain the significance of the matzoh and the maror (bitter herbs), but no explanation is given for the reclining or dipping. (Could we even answer the dipping question by admitting it was really a ruse to get their attention?) Do we rely on our eventually (after extolling the virtues of discussing the exodus at length) alluding to an overriding answer as to why we have a Seder when we say "therefore we are obligated to praise and give thanks to the One Who performed miracles for us, bringing us from servitude to freedom," etc. to satisfy the curiosity of the son we manipulated into asking the question(s)?

Okay, so I kind of framed the question unfairly, as the "four questions" were instituted as part of the liturgy in case the participants of the Seder had no questions of their own that would start the conversation about G-d taking us out of Egypt (see P'sachim 116a). But the form the question(s) and answer(s) take do raise questions about how we are supposed to deal with questions asked of us. Are we supposed to ignore some questions because the questioner is not really ready for the answer (similar to the way we avoid explaining why we "dip")? Are we supposed to delay giving a direct answer to either distract the questioner from the question or to first provide a full context for the answer (as we do for the reasons for the matzoh and maror)? Are we supposed to assume that the person asking the question can put two and two together without us having to spell it explicitly, as we do by expressing the reason why we recline (our G-d given freedom) without saying explicitly "this is why we recline"?

These questions about how to deal with questions are not a simple matter, but knowing how to respond to questions is primary for every parent and educator, as well as being important during discussions with friends and acquaintances. It is also important to realize that even questions that seem to be coming from a somewhat sarcastic, "wise-guy" perspective (been there, done that, throughout my elementary and high school years) often have a seriously inquisitive foundation, and anything less that a serious answer that fully addresses the question sends a message that there is no real response to the issue raised.

Unfortunately, not every person who is asked a question is fully prepared to answer it. Nevertheless, it is very importance that questions aren't simply ignored or pushed off. (It goes without saying, or should go without saying, that simply jotting down good questions to include them in a school newsletter without providing an answer is unacceptable, and ultimately discourages students from asking questions since they learn not to expect any answers.) It should become common practice for parents and educators to have regular discussions with other parents and educators about how they deal with specific questions, as the shared knowledge base will benefit all involved. Administrators and community leaders need to have an open line of communication with the members of their community (including the educators they oversee) so that the latter know who they can speak to about answering questions they aren't sure about how to answer. Getting a response of "that's a good question, let me think about it" or "let me look into it" is far superior to a weak or unsatisfactory answer (as long as a full answer is forthcoming in a timely matter). There is nothing shameful about not having "the" answer on the spot. The greatest "talmiday chachamim" (Torah scholars) often have to research things further before giving an answer; we can and should do the same. Once the student/son/daughter sees that we take their questions seriously and do come back to them with genuine

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responses, they will gain confidence in the responses we give them. And if we are confident that we can find an answer to relay to them, we can confidently respond that we will get back to them about it.

What about those questions that don't have an easy answer? Advances in the fields of astronomy, geology, archeology and the other sciences have brought with them challenges that previous generations did not have to address, leaving us without any real tradition regarding how to deal with them. But this can be communicated to them as well. When asked what the official "Jewish" position is about the figure at the center of the Christian religion, my response has been to explain how the traditional Jewish approach to anything stems from the discussions in the Talmud about it, and the volumes of subsequent commentaries on that Talmudic discussion. Since any such discussion, or any discussion that was thought to be about it, was excised from the Talmud by Christian censors, there was no Talmudic discussion for all subsequent generations to further expound upon, and no "official" perspective ever developed. The same can be said regarding questions that only arose because of recent scientific developments; how could the Talmud or the Rishonim (early commentators) have bequeathed their thoughts to us on a topic that wasn't known to them? It is incumbent upon the community and its leaders to acknowledge such questions and develop reasonable responses to them, but until they/we do, there is nothing wrong with explaining why a question is difficult to answer; doing so is much more satisfactory than giving a half-baked answer. In addition, the importance of learning that not every question has an easy answer might be the most valuable lesson of all.

Getting back to the Seder, we may not provide a direct answer to all four parts of the question, but hopefully, using the prescribed liturgy as a starting point for a wider, more complete discussion, enough of a context has been presented to encourage all those in attendance to ask further questions and seek even better answers. Ultimately, the responsibility for getting an answer falls on the person asking the question. We will not be held accountable for not finding answers, but we will be held accountable for not trying hard enough to find those answers. And that includes moving past not being given satisfactory answers by others, whether it was when we were in school or as adults. Quite often, questions arise based on how we understood things when we were younger, or at least how we remember them being taught to us. We have to be mature enough to know that things may have been purposely presented in a simplistic manner at that age because many aren't ready to be taught things with their full complexity and nuances. (Or perhaps the teacher never grew beyond that mindset.) But that doesn't mean our level of understanding should be stuck at a grade school or high school level. We must keep learning, and constantly try to understand things on a deeper, more mature level. Since it is primarily the responsibility of each individual to search for (and do his or her best to find) answers, building a knowledge base, and constantly continuing to build upon that base, is the best, and for the long term only, way to fulfill this obligation. Only by being somewhat knowledgeable can we determine whose answers we can trust (and therefore whom to ask the question to). The more knowledgeable we become, the better we can assess which answers are more likely to be true, and which are fully consistent with our tradition. After building that foundation (and continually building upon it), and then putting in a full and sincere effort (all the while being patient, recognizing our own limitations and that we may not find every answer, at least not right away), with the help of the All-knowing One we will discover enough of an answer to keep searching. *© 2014 Rabbi D. Kramer*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

How does one attain the status of kedusha (holiness), commanded in one of this week's Torah portions? (Leviticus 19:2)

Some maintain that the pathway to holiness is to separate from the real world. Suppressing the body is the only way the soul can soar.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik points out that this is the predominant approach of most faith communities. The ish ha-da'at, the universal religious person, as Rav Soloveitchik terms it, is the religious figure who sees the escape from the body as a prerequisite for spiritual striving.

There is a more mainstream Jewish approach to kedusha. It suggests that the body is neither to be vilified nor glorified. Every aspect of human physical activity is to be sanctified. This, writes Rav Soloveitchik is the goal of the ish halakha (halakhic man). To apply Jewish law to every aspect of life, ennobling and yes, "kedushifying" our every endeavor.

This analysis sheds light on our approach to the concepts of kodesh and hol (commonly translated, the holy and the profane). Some Orthodox Jews feel

that disciplines that are not pure Torah are simply hol (profane). Hol is only useful when it helps us to better understand kodesh. For example, through chemistry one can better evaluate the kashrut of food products. One may study language in order to be viewed as a cultured Westerner so that Torah will be more respected. Or, one studies medicine to provide for one's family or one's charity. In each of these examples, hol is intrinsically not kodesh and can never transform into kodesh.

The ish halakha sees it differently. Every discipline, whether it be chemistry, language or medicine, are all potentially aspects of Torah. As Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook has pointed out, "There is nothing unholy, there is only the holy and the not yet holy." If one studies Torah in an intense fashion, it will give new meaning, new direction, new purpose and in the end, sanctify hol. Hol is not a permanent status; it can transform into kodesh.

For the ish halakha there is nothing in the world devoid of G-d's imprint. The way one loves, the way one conducts oneself in business, the way one eats, are all no less holy then praying, learning and fasting.

For the ish ha-da'at, the movement is from this world, the world of the body and soul to the next world, the world of pure soul. Death is a release from the imprisonment of the body. This philosophy is espoused by many fundamentalist Christians and Muslims. For them, redemption comes through death. This approach to life has been used in some parts of the Arab world to induce young men and even women to become suicide bombers - terrorist, homicidal bombers. "Kill yourself," these youngsters are taught, "and murder countless numbers of innocent people and you will receive true reward in the afterlife."

For Torah, the movement is in the reverse - from the other world to this world. To take the teachings of the Torah - from the world beyond - and to apply it to this world sanctifying every aspect of human life. For Torah, ultimate sanctification comes through living every moment a life of Torah ethics. This in fact is the challenge of this week's portion-kedoshim tihyu, you shall be holy.

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

There is a fascinating sequence of commands in the great "holiness code" with which our parsha begins, that sheds light on the nature not just of leadership in Judaism but also of followership. Here is the command in context: Do not hate your brother in your heart. Reprove [or reason with] your neighbour frankly so you will not bear sin because of him. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord. (Lev. 19: 17-18)

There are two completely different ways of understanding the italicized words. Maimonides brings them both as legally binding.[1] Nahmanides includes them both in his commentary to the Torah.[2]

The first is to read the command in terms of interpersonal relations. Someone, you believe, has done you harm. In such a case, says the Torah, do not remain in a state of silent resentment. Do not give way to hate, do not bear a grudge, and do not take revenge. Instead, reprove him, reason with him, tell him what you believe he has done and how you feel it has harmed you. He may apologise and seek to make amends. Even if he does not, at least you have made your feelings known to him. That in itself is cathartic. It will help you to avoid nursing a grievance.

The second interpretation, though, sees the command in impersonal terms. It has nothing to do you being harmed. It refers to someone you see acting wrongly, committing a sin or a crime. You may not be the victim. You may be just an observer. The command tells us not to be content with passing a negative judgment on his behaviour (i.e. with "hating him in your heart"). You must get involved. You should remonstrate with him, pointing out in as gentle and constructive a way as you can, that what he is doing is against the law, civil or moral. If you stay silent and do nothing, you will become complicit in his guilt (i.e. "bear sin because of him") because you saw him do wrong and you did nothing to protest.

This second interpretation is possible only because of Judaism's fundamental principle that kol Yisrael arevin zeh ba-zeh, "All Jews are sureties [i.e. responsible] for one another." However, the Talmud makes a fascinating observation about the scope of the command: One of the rabbis said to Raba: [The Torah says] hokheach tokhiach, meaning "you shall reprove your neighbour repeatedly" [because the verb is doubled, implying more than once]. Might this mean hokheach, reprove him once, and tokhiach, a second time? No, he replied, the word hokheach means, even a hundred times. Why then does it add the word tokhiach? Had there been only a single verb I would have known that the law applies to a master reproving his disciple. How do we know that it applies even to a disciple reproving his master? From the phrase, hokheach tokhiach, implying, under all circumstances.[3]

This is significant because it establishes a principle of critical followership. So far in these essays we have been looking at the role of the leader in Judaism. But what about that of the follower? On the face of it the duty of the follower is to follow, and that of the disciple to learn. After all, Judaism commands

[1] Maimonides, Hilkhot Deot 6:6-7.
[2] Nahmanides, Commentary to Leviticus 19:17.
[3] Baba Metzia 31a.

almost unlimited respect for teachers. "Let reverence for your teacher be as great as your reverence for heaven," said the sages. Despite this the Talmud understands the Torah to be commanding us to remonstrate even with our teacher or leader should we see him or her doing something wrong.

Supposing a leader commands you to do something you know to be forbidden in Jewish law. Should you obey? The answer is a categorical No. The Talmud puts this in the form of a rhetorical question: "Faced with a choice between obeying the master [G-d] or the disciple [a human leader], whom should you obey?"[4] The answer is obvious. Obey G-d. Here in Jewish law is the logic of civil disobedience, the idea that we have a duty to disobey an immoral order.

Then there is the great Jewish idea of active questioning and "argument for the sake of heaven." Parents are obliged, and teachers encouraged, to train students to ask questions. Traditional Jewish learning is designed to make teacher and disciple alike aware of the fact that more than one view is possible on any question of Jewish law and multiple interpretations (the traditional number is seventy) of any biblical verse. Judaism is unique in that virtually all of its canonical texts – Midrash, Mishnah and Gemara – are anthologies of arguments (Rabbi X said this, Rabbi Y said that) or are surrounded by multiple commentaries each with its own perspective.

The very act of learning in rabbinic Judaism is conceived as active debate, a kind of gladiatorial contest of the mind: "Even a teacher and disciple, even a father and son, when they sit to study Torah together become enemies to one another. But they do not move from there until they have become beloved to one another."[5] Hence the Talmudic saying, "Much wisdom I have learned from my teacher, more from my colleagues but most from my students."[6] Therefore despite the reverence we owe our teachers, we owe them also our best efforts at questioning and challenging their ideas. This is essential to the rabbinical ideal of learning as a collaborative pursuit of truth.

The idea of critical followership gave rise in Judaism to the world's first social critics, the prophets, mandated by G-d to speak truth to power and to summon even kings to the bar of justice and right conduct. That is what Samuel did to Saul, Elijah to Ahab and Isaiah to Hezekiah. None did so more effectively than the prophet Nathan when, with immense skill, he got King David to appreciate the enormity of his sin in sleeping with another man's wife. David immediately recognised his wrong and said chatati, "I have sinned."[7]

[4] Kiddushin 42b.
[5] Kiddushin 30b
[6] Ta'anit 7a.
[7] 2 Samuel 12:13.

Exceptional though the prophets of Israel were, even their achievement takes second place to one of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of religion, namely that G-d himself chooses as His most beloved disciples the very people who are willing to challenge heaven itself. Abraham says, "Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?" Moses says, "Why have you done evil to this people?" Jeremiah and Habakkuk challenge G-d on the apparent injustices of history. Job, who argues with G-d, is eventually vindicated by G-d, while his comforters, who defended G-d, are deemed by G-d to have been in the wrong. In short, G-d Himself chooses active, critical followers rather than those who silently obey.

Hence the unusual conclusion that in Judaism followership is as active and demanding as leadership. We can put this more strongly: leaders and followers do not sit on opposite sides of the table. They are on the same side, the side of justice and compassion and the common good. No one is above criticism, and no one too junior to administer it, if done with due grace and humility. A disciple may criticise his teacher; a child may challenge a parent; a prophet may challenge a king; and all of us, simply by bearing the name Israel, are summoned to wrestle with G-d and our fellow humans in the name of the right and the good.

Uncritical followership and habits of silent obedience give rise to the corruptions of power, or sometimes simply to avoidable catastrophes. For example, a series of fatal accidents occurred between 1970 and 1999 to planes belonging to Korean Air. One in particular, Korean Air Flight 8509 in December 1999, led to a review that suggested that Korean culture, with its tendency toward autocratic leadership and deferential followership, may have been responsible for the first officer not warning the pilot that he was off-course.

John F. Kennedy assembled one of the most talented group of advisors ever to serve an American President, yet in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 committed one of the most foolish mistakes. Subsequently, one of the members of the group, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., attributed the error to the fact that the atmosphere within the group was so convivial that no one wanted to disturb it by pointing out the folly of the proposal.[8]

Groupthink and conformism are perennial dangers within any closely-knit group, as a series of famous experiments by Solomon Asch, Stanley Milgram, Philip Zimbardo and others have shown. Which is why, in Cass Sunstein's phrase, "societies need dissent." My favourite example is one given by James Surowiecki in The Wisdom of Crowds. He tells the story of how an American naturalist, William Beebe, came across a strange sight in the Guyana jungle. A

[8] See Cass Sunstein, Why Societies Need Dissent, Harvard University Press, 2003, 2-3.

group of army ants was moving in a huge circle. The ants went round and round in the same circle for two days until most of them dropped dead. The reason is that when a group of army ants is separated from their colony, they obey a simple rule: follow the ant in front of you.[9] The trouble is that if the ant in front of you is lost, so will you be.

Surowiecki's argument is that we need dissenting voices, people who challenge the conventional wisdom, resist the fashionable consensus and disturb the intellectual peace. "Follow the person in front of you" is as dangerous to humans as it is to army ants. To stand apart and be willing to question where the leader is going is the task of the critical follower. Great leadership happens when there is strong and independently minded followership. Hence, when it comes to constructive criticism, a disciple may challenge a teacher and a prophet reprimand a king.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The usual translation of the word kdoshim into English is "holy." As is also usual in translations from Hebrew into English, it does not carry with it the nuance that is present in the original Hebrew word. Kdoshim is not exclusively meant to represent holiness in the common usage of the word but it encompasses a dedication and devotion to a cause, an idea - to a faith itself. The Lord Himself, so to speak, describes His own Being as being not only holy but also as being dedicated – dedicated to fulfill His Will through the people of Israel, their history, behavior, events and destiny.

By describing Himself in this fashion, G-d reassures us that there is purpose to our lives and actions. He desires that we be dedicated throughout our lives, in all of our actions, to educate the world in His ways and value system. His dedication to us is oftentimes hidden and not clearly understood and appreciated but it is eternal and ongoing.

Our dedication to Him and His Torah must also be of that very nature – eternal and ongoing. Thus holiness is no longer to be viewed as pure piety, noble as that trait is, but rather also to be one of perseverance and tenacity, even stubbornness, if you will. The stiff-necked people are also the holy and dedicated people. This overriding sense of loyalty and tenacity of spirit and action is truly one of the basic hallmarks of Jewish history and life.

It is no coincidence that it is this parsha of the Torah that contains such a large number of commandments. For dedication and loyalty can only be translated into behavior by rote, ritual and varied actions. That is why the Mishna itself commented that the Lord wanted to prove Israel meritorious by providing such a large number and great variety of commandments to be fulfilled and performed. For only by such a regimen are human beings able to develop loyalty, purpose and a firm commitment to goodness and righteousness.

We are all creatures of habit and in developing good habits we become transformed into being good people. Good habits require drill and repetition, firmness and discipline. There are no shortcuts to holiness or dedication, no easy faith and convenient sense of religion. So the Jew is surrounded on all sides in one's daily life by G-d's commandments.

Everything in life becomes capable of holiness and dedication to G-d's nobility of existence. There really is nothing in life that is truly relegated to the mundane and unholy. It is the human attitude towards events and actions, the sense of purpose and dedication that accompanies one's actions which define the holiness and dedication of each and every action and facet of our existence. This plethora of commandments is meant to enhance and accomplish this holy purpose and give eternal meaning to our lives and society. That is why the lord is justified in ordering us to be a just, holy and dedicated people.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18). One of the most oft-quoted verses of the Bible appears in this week's Torah reading, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord" (Lev.19:18). In fact, one of the towering figures of the Oral Law, the famed Rabbi Akiva, referred to this commandment with the addendum: "this is the great rule of the Torah" (zeh klal gadol baTorah), (Rashi, ad loc) which I take to mean that this is the commandment which is the goal of all other commandments, the "meta-halakhic" principle which lies behind the other commandments; the end-goal towards which all other commandments must lead us. Indeed, if the very G-d definition which we humans can comprehend is "Lord of love, Lord of love, Compassionate and Freely Giving G-d, Long-Suffering, Full of Loving Kindness and Truth," (Ex. 34: 6) and if the central commandment of the Torah is "Thou shalt walk in His (Divine) ways," (Deut. 28:9) then the unifying principle of all of our actions and emotions must be, "Just as He is loving, compassionate and freely-giving so must we humans be loving, compassionate and freely-giving;" in other words, we

[9] James Surowiecki, The Wisdom of Crowds, Little, Brown, 2004, 40-41.

must love our neighbor as ourselves if we wish in any way to emulate the Divine. (See Rambam, Hilchot De'ot, 1: 11)

But one of the mysteries of the life and teaching of Rabbi Akiva is that this very same commandment, which was so cardinal for him, came back to haunt him. The Talmud records that between the period of Passover and Lag B'omer (fifteen days before Shavuot), twelve - thousand pairs of Rabbi Akiva's disciples died. Indeed, it is because of their death that these weeks have become a season of semi-mourning for observant Jews, with weddings, hair-cuts and group festivities absolutely forbidden at this time. And when the Talmudic Sages query as to why such Torah scholars met such a premature demise during such a concentrated period, the response is "because they did not treat each other with proper respect;" in other words, they did not properly keep the commandment to love your neighbor like yourself (B.T. Yebamot 62b)! Could it be that the great master's disciples failed to internalize the major teaching of their Rebbe? If indeed Rabbi Akiva began to emphasize this command only after the tragedy befell his students, it may be understandable; but it is difficult to imagine that such a Torah giant would have grasped the central significance of this cardinal commandment only at the end of his life!

I believe that the answer to the mystery may be found upon a deeper examination of the circumstances surrounding the death of the 24,000 students. After the Talmud records the time-frame of their demise - from Passover until fifteen days before Shavuot - Rabbi Nahman adds that the immediate cause of their death was "askera," a foreign word which Rashi defines as diphtheria - whooping cough, a plague (B.T. Yebamot, ibid). However, we have no corroborating evidence, either from a parallel Talmudic passage or from the period - historian Josephus, that a plague broke out at this time; moreover, it is difficult to imagine a malady which only affected the students of one particular master!

Rav Hai Gaon maintains that Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students were killed not in a plague but rather in the Bar Kochba Rebellion. Approximately sixty-five years after the destruction of the Second Temple at the hands of the Roman government, Rabbi Akiba accepted the possibility that Shimon bar Kochba was the long-awaited Messiah-King of Jewish redemption, and urged the Judeans to wage a war of independence against Rome; indeed, he organized what was in effect the first Yeshivat Hesder in history. It makes eminently good sense that in the massive defeat of Bar Kochba's legions, 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's disciples lost their lives. It is also quite possible that Rabbi Nahman's askera might come from the Greek sicarii, which means "by the sword"! Hence, it was not a plague but rather a War of Independence against Rome which claimed the lives of so many of Rabbi Akiva's students.

There remains one more piece to this puzzle. Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai was one of the teachers of Rabbi Akiva - and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai had prescribed accommodation with Rome sixty-five years earlier just prior to the Temple's destruction. Indeed, it was Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai who went out to meet Vespasian, the Roman General, and made the deal of giving up Jerusalem in return for the city of Yavneh and her wise men (Gittin 56a).

One version of the Talmud records that Rabbi Akiva vehemently disagreed with the "dovish" approach of his Rebbe; the disciple is even cited as having criticized his teacher by quoting a prophetic verse which he claimed referred to Rabbi Yohanan: "Sometimes wise men are turned backwards and their wisdom is transformed into foolishness" (Isaiah 44:25).

Undoubtedly, Rabbi Akiva was a great idealist who believed passionately in Jewish national sovereignty over Israel and Jerusalem. But - at least according to this version of the Talmud - the heat of the moment caused him to speak in less than respectful terms concerning a leading Jewish Scholar and one of his foremost teachers. Can it be that Rabbi Akiva's own disciples learned not from what their Rabbi taught as much as from what their Rabbi said - and so they too did not speak respectfully to each other, especially when they had differing political views even amongst themselves. We see from here the awesome responsibility of a Rebbe. And we also see how the beginning of the end of any national uprising or even defensive war is when the people supposedly on the same side deflect their energy away from the enemy and towards their own internal dissensions; this is the causeless hatred which has always caused Israel to miss our chance for redemption!

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Striving for Holiness

Parashat Kedoshim is often combined with the previous parasha of Acharei Mot except during a Jewish leap year. This year is one such occasion. That allows us to concentrate our discussion to Parashat Kedoshim alone. There is one problem with this approach. It is clear that the discussion of ervah, impure sexual relations, that we find in perek yud chet, Chapter 18, is continued at the end of our parasha in perek chaf, Chapter 20. Our parasha which is primarily found in the intervening chapter must either be seen as an interruption or a bridge between the two. Rashi clearly sees it as a bridge as is evidenced by his explanation of the second pasuk in our perek. The Torah tells us, “Vay’dabeir Hashem el Moshe leimor, and Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. Dabeir el kol adat B’nei Yisrael v’amarta aleihem k’doshim tih’yu ki

kadosh Ani Hashem Elokeichem, speak to all the congregation of B'nei Yisrael and say to them you shall be Holy because I the Hashem your Elokim am Holy." Rashi explains that the word Kadosh means separate, namely, that one should separate himself from contact with ervah, those forbidden sexual relationships. Other meforshim acknowledge a much broader interpretation of the reason for the word Kadosh but we will pick up that discussion later.

The beginning words of the second pasuk are purposeful and unusual. HaRav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains that there are only two places in the Torah where the command to Moshe is to speak to kol adat B'nei Yisrael, the entire congregation of the B'nei Yisrael. The very first commandment given to the Jewish people as a whole was given before the Y'tziyat Mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt. There Moshe was told to speak to the entire congregation of the B'nei Yisrael to recognize the New Moon of the month of Nisan and to make that the first of the months of the year. This was done because the entire congregation needed to know the time-schedule for leaving Mitzrayim and to prepare the lambs that they would slaughter for the Korban Pesach. Hirsch suggests in our parasha this is to indicate that "no position in life, no sex, no age, no degree of fortune, is excluded from this call specially addresses, kedoshim "holy" are we all to be." Just as with the Korban Pesach, each individual of the nation needed to take on this responsibility for himself. He either had to bring the Korban Pesach or be part of a group sacrifice but he could not shirk that responsibility or his firstborn would die and he and his family would not leave Egypt. There when the nation was first becoming a unified group it was possible to join with another to fulfill the responsibility together. Here, where the moral conduct of an individual is concerned, each person must take it upon himself to separate from immoral conduct. Even for those meforshim who do not view this call to be Kadosh as a call for morality still the idea of separating oneself to a higher level of conduct must be carried out by each person separately. While it is true that one can be influenced by others and can receive encouragement by them, it is still incumbent on the individual to control his own behavior.

Rashi on Shemot (34:32) quotes Masechet Eruvin (54) to explain the normal procedure for the passing on of the mesorah, the laws and traditions, to the Jewish people. "How was the Oral Law imparted? Moses learned from the mouth of the Almighty. Aharon then entered and Moses recited the lesson for him. Aharon withdrew and sat on Moshe's left. Aharon's sons then entered and Moshe recited the lesson for them. They withdrew and Eliezer sat on Moshe's right and Itamar sat on Aharon's left. The Elders then entered and Moshe recited the lesson for them. They withdrew and seated themselves at the side. Then all of the people entered and Moshe recited the lesson for them. In this way the people heard it once, the Elders twice, Aharon's sons three times, and Aharon four." Why were these laws deemed so important that they were taught with everyone assembled together to hear them for the first time? Here Rashi explains that these laws contain the basis for most of the laws of the Torah. As such Hashem wanted the people to hear them at the same time.

HaRav Sorotzkin, the Aznayim L'Torah, brings another explanation for the separation requested by the command kedoshim tih'yu, you shall be holy. We are told in the Torah, "k'ma'aseh Eretz Mitzrayim … lo ta'asu u'ch'ma'aseh Eretz K'na'an … lo ta'asu, like the actions of the Land of Egypt you shall not do and like the actions of the Land of Canaan you shall not do." We are not permitted to imitate the behavior of the Egyptians or the Canaanites because of their many gods and their evil ways. But if there are seventy nations in the world that still leaves us to imitate sixty-eight of them. We are warned in many places not to follow their idolatry but there are many laws that they have which appear similar to ours. The other nations of the world are required to have a legal system by the Seven Laws of Noah and indeed many of these nations do have those laws. How can we know that where possible our laws take preference over the laws of the land? The Aznayim L'Torah indicates that there are seventy mitzvot that are mentioned in this parasha. It is clear that this is a remez, a hint, that just as these laws are reminiscent of most of the Torah laws, so we are required to follow the Torah laws which separate us from all of the other nations of the world who do not accept our Torah. We are required to bring our cases to a Jewish court rather than a secular one while still following the laws of the country in which we dwell. In some cases we must bring issues to the secular courts but we must also prefer the use of our Jewish courts just as we prefer the laws of the Torah to laws that were created with Man's limited understanding of absolute justice.

The Ramban explains the concept of separation and Kadosh differently. He mentions that while the term Kadosh is used everywhere that we find reference to ervah, improper sexual relationships, yet it is truly much broader in its scope. Hashem has given us laws which limit sexual relationships yet sexual relations between a man and his wife are permitted and encouraged. Hashem has restricted the type of food that we eat yet we are permitted to eat and drink from those foods which are permitted. One might think that one is then free to indulge in each of these areas with wanton abandon. The term Kadosh requires that we exercise restraint and control of our actions so that we are not obsessed with sex, food, or drink. This self-control is the command to be Holy.

There is still one aspect of the second pasuk

which needs further discussion. The pasuk ends with the phrase, “ki kadosh Ani Hashem Elokeichem, because I Hashem your Elokim am Holy.” Hashem has given us a series of laws which demonstrate the concern we are to have for our fellowman and for ourselves. Instead of emulating the great societies of the world like the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Greeks, the Romans, or any modern-day countries we are to take our standards from Hashem. As we act with holiness on Earth we proclaim His Holiness in the Heavens. In that way Hashem will be known on Earth as a deity which is different than the deities of other societies. His people on Earth glorify His name through their proper behavior even when society approves of acts which Hashem considers immoral.

Jews have always been in the forefront of society’s causes even when we are mistaken and misguided by what we have been told is injustice. We have forgotten to consult the Torah and our Sages to determine what we should and should not support. Yet at least we take a stand and fight for justice and truth. The concept of tikun olam, correcting the wrongs of the world, stems from this week’s parasha. What we must remember is that we must act with the same self-control that we see in the Ramban. We must fight for justice and truth but not by thinking that everything is truth and all suffering is due to injustice. In order to know what to support we need only study the Torah. Hashem has given us His guide so that we can be a nation that is kedoshim teh’yu, a nation that strives for holiness. *© 2014 Rabbi D. Levin*

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS

Torah Bytes

Parshat Kedoshim begins with the commandment to "Be holy." How do we achieve holiness? Nachmanides explains that holiness is the result of exercising restraint in areas that are permitted to you.

For example, let's say a person keeps kosher. It may be no great challenge for him to refrain from eating a ham sandwich. But the question is: When he sits down to eat kosher food, what is his frame of mind: Does he pronounce a blessing with concentration, appreciating G-d's gift of bounty? Does he eat slowly and with dignity? Does he focus on the fact that the ultimate purpose of food is to nourish the body-in order to have strength to do good deeds?

The story is told of the Baal Shem Tov, the great kabbalist, who looked out the window and saw his neighbor sitting at the dinner table. In the eyes of the Baal Shem Tov, the neighbor appeared not as a human, but as an ox. The neighbor was eating for purely physical reasons, just as would an ox (and the holy Baal Shem Tov was able to perceive this). Although the neighbor was acting in a permitted manner, it was not a holy one.

Sometimes a child will do something that demonstrates particular self-discipline, and the parent will say: "You're an angel!" But in actuality, the child is greater than an angel. An angel is a purely spiritual being, with no sense of "free will" to choose spirituality over the mundane. But we humans-every time we make such a choice-refine our soul, and achieve a level higher and holier than even that of angels. *© 2008 Rabbi S. Simmons and aish.com*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Buried deep in Parshat Kedoshim is the Jewish dictum that one should "love your fellow as yourself" (19:18). R' Akiva said in the Gemara (Tractate) that this is the fundamental rule of the Torah. Many commentators explain what's so significant about this commandment, ranging from its focus on selflessness, love, consideration, respect, and even of loving yourself. Hillel, however, changed the wording a bit, saying that "what is hateful to you, do not do onto others" (Shabbat 31a). By Hillel's rephrasing and focusing on hate, all the wonderful lessons our commentators derived seem to be negated! Why would Hillel do this?

The truth is that if we thought about the real essence of this Mitzvah (commandment), we'd realize that Hillel didn't change anything, and in fact helped us focus on the most important aspect of it. The commandment of loving another as you love yourself is one of the rare instances of commandments that no one can EVER do alone. The point isn't merely to treat others with love, respect and consideration, but to HAVE others around you so that you may love, respect and consider them. Hillel was saying that Judaism lives, thrives and depends on having a community of others around us, so that we can hone our relationship with each other (thereby improving our relationship with G-d himself). The message couldn't be more pertinent to us today: Treat others around us with the love, respect and consideration they deserve, but make sure you have a community around us that deserves that very consideration. *© 2008 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.*

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