

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Barry Ross,
Binyomin Yitzchak ben Meir. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS KEDOSHIM

Holier Than Thou?

And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to all the congregation of Bnei Yisroel, and say to them, become holy; for I Hashem your God, am holy. Everyone should revere their mother and father, and you should keep my Sabbaths, I am Hashem your God (19:1-3).

Parshas Kedoshim begins with Hashem exhorting Bnei Yisroel to become *kadosh* for Hashem is *kadosh*. The word *kadosh* is commonly translated as "holy." The meaning of the word holy is generally understood as "connected to God or religion." In other words, we generally measure holiness vis-à-vis a person's relationship with God.

A simple review of the verse shows that we cannot understand the word *kadosh* to mean "holy." After all, Hashem cannot be "connected" to Himself. So we are left with a fairly serious question; what is *kedushah* and how does one strive to achieve it? In addition, how is the next verse, which commands reverence for one's parents, connected to this idea of being *kadosh*?

The word *kodesh* actually means to set aside or separate. When a man designates a woman to be his wife, she is "*mekudeshes*" to him. We say in *davening* that Hashem was *mekadesh* the Shabbos, meaning that he designated a day for us to commune with Him. Similarly, Hashem was *mekadesh* the Jewish people – it doesn't mean that He made us holy; rather He separated us from all the other nations, to be His alone.

So what exactly does it mean that Hashem is *kadosh*? Perhaps it is easier to understand what *kadosh* means as it relates to something we, as humans, are striving for. A baby is born very self-centered; everything is about satisfying its own needs and desires. This is only natural as a baby only senses itself. As a child matures, hopefully, it begins to recognize the outside world and its place within a broader perspective. This process of becoming less and less self-centered is the process of removing yourself from your egocentricity.

In other words, Hashem is asking us to separate ourselves from our self-centered desires and to focus outwardly. The perfect example of such a separation is Hashem Himself. Hashem is perfect with no needs or desires. All of His actions in creating the world had nothing to do with any perceived need; rather it is all a function of His wish to bestow the ultimate good on humanity. When it comes to Hashem, there are no self-serving actions, only actions directed for others. Therefore, Hashem is *kadosh* because His actions are separate from Himself.

We are therefore commanded to become *kadosh* like him. Rashi (ad loc)



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explains that this means separating from forbidden intimate relationships. As we explained last week, this is why this *parsha* follows the list of forbidden relationships. A person's strongest desire is in this area because it is so self-serving. Controlling ourselves is the key to separating from our egocentricity.

Many, if not most, children view their mother as their chef, chauffeur, butler, maid, and personal shopper, while their father is the ATM machine that makes it all possible. In other words, the world revolves around an "it's all about me" attitude. This is very dangerous to our children's emotional wellbeing and of course, to their future relationships in life. The most important lesson that we must teach our children is that we do everything for them out of love – not because the world revolves around them. The antidote, therefore, is to have great reverence for our parents. We owe our parents because nothing is "coming" to us. We have to break the sense of self and learn to focus outwardly, just like Hashem. Then we will be *kadosh* like Him.

Kindness is a Shame

And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a shameful thing [...] (20:17).

The Torah's description of this act is termed "chessed." Rashi (ad loc) explains that the Torah is using an Aramaic word here that means "shame." Remarkably, the same word in Hebrew is actually associated with only positive implications; the word "chessed" means "kindness." How is it possible that the same word can have two seemingly disparate meanings?

The explanation is fairly simple. Both of these words are describing the same

act; that of giving to others. The difference in the meaning is based on one's perspective. The giver feels good in that he is doing an act of kindness. On the other hand, the person who is receiving is generally feeling some level of shame in that he is reliant on others to support himself.

Aramaic is the language of understanding another person's perspective. That is why the heavenly angels are unable to understand

Aramaic, they are linear beings. It is also for this reason that the Talmud Bavli (written in Aramaic) was chosen over the Talmud Yerushalmi (written in Hebrew) and accepted as the authoritative source of *halacha*, for we can only properly understand what Hashem wants from us when we can accurately evaluate another person's view. This allows us to see beyond our own perspective and eventually reach the truth.

When Right is Wrong

You shall not take revenge [...] you shall love your friend as yourself [...] (19:18).

Rashi (ad loc) describes what the Torah's definition of revenge is (updated for a 21st century audience): Reuven asks his friend Shimon to borrow his lawnmower and Shimon refuses. The next day Shimon asks Reuven to borrow his hedge clippers and Reuven responds, "Just as you didn't lend me your lawnmower, I am refusing to lend you my hedge clippers." This is the definition of taking revenge.

Let us examine this. When Shimon refuses to lend his lawnmower to Reuven, he "only" transgresses a

positive commandment – that of loving your friend as yourself. Yet when Reuven refuses to lend his clippers to Shimon, he is transgressing both a positive commandment and a negative commandment – that of "not taking revenge." This seems unfair. After all, on the face of it, Reuven seems perfectly justified in refusing to lend his clippers to Shimon; why shouldn't he treat him the same way and let Shimon learn how painful it feels to be refused? In fact, Reuven can even feel justified in that he is teaching Shimon a lesson in how to

treat a fellow Jew. Why is Reuven now subject to an additional transgression?

Reuven gets an additional transgression for exactly this reason. In his mind, Reuven is justifying why it is right to do a wrong thing. Shimon is, at worst, an unkind person. On the other hand, Reuven is feeling justified in his mistreatment of Shimon, he is making his refusal to Shimon a "mitzvah." Justifying a wrong is far more severe than missing an opportunity to do something right.

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