

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KEDOSHIM

Haftarah: Yehezkel 20:2-20

MAY 13-14, 2016 6 IYAR 5776

Day 21 of the Omer

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Farha Aziza Bibi

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## Editors Notes

### Kedoshim- Emulating God

This week's portion begins with the command "Kedoshim Tihiyu - You shall be holy for holy am I, Hashem your G-d." The obvious question is how does one define Kadosh and how does one define holy? Kadosh often implies a notion of being separate. Does that mean we are being commanded to ascend to the top of a mountain in a loin cloth, with a jug of water and a sleeping bag to meditate, fast and live out life as an ascetic? From a Jewish perspective, the answer is obviously not.

Perhaps we are being commanded to emulate G-dly behavior. Just as G-d is kind, forgiving and generous, so should we be the same. The Talmud in Sota notes: Rebi Simlai explained: The Torah begins with [an act of] chesed and ends with [an act of] chesed, as it says, "G-d made for the man and his wife garments of leather and clothed them (Bereshit 3:21)." It ends with [an act of] chesed, as it says, "He (G-d) buried (Moshe) in the valley ... (Devarim 34:6)." Clearly, if any characteristic exemplifies the Jewish people, it is the characteristic of chesed. Just as Abraham, who is principally known for his chesed, was the founding forefather of the entire Jewish people, chesed is the founding principle upon which the Jewish people were established. Perhaps being holy is emulating Hashem's quality of Chesed.

We have often written that children do as they see and not as they are told. We were blessed to grow up in a world of Chesed. I recall as a child of eleven or twelve working in my dad's office during the summer. Friday was pay day when envelopes with their weekly pay, were distributed to each worker. In addition to the workers, there were others who stopped in each Friday for their "pay checks". I remember asking my brother what was going on and he explained that my dad would give these people a weekly "salary" as Sedakah.

My dad grew up in a world of chesed. He began working at 8 years old and witnessed the daily cluster of "collectors" visiting the offices of Bibi and Company beginning in the early thirties, and each walking out with an envelope. My grandfather Reuben was responsible for meeting with each collector who was warmly welcomed and given funds to help with his collection. At one point, he complained to his brother David and nephew Nouri that there were too many people coming and there wasn't enough money. Instead of reducing how many they could help, they decided to take more from their own salaries each week to endow the charity fund. And those who came often found more than an envelope. Almost all were fed and many were given a place to sleep. Anyone who needed a job was given work in the factory. Those who needed loans for their own business from their free loan society were never turned away.

Typically one in need stretches forth his hand, you then stretch forth your arm and place into his hand the money or gift with your hand. Rabbi Abittan would describe this as the living Hashems name. The poor Yud stretches his hand the heh, you send forth your arm, the vav and give from your hand to his, the heh. To each of us, the guy needing something comes, knocks on the door and hopefully we can give him something and he departs with a smile. Maybe he comes to us in the office, or in the synagogue, or in our homes, but its him who comes to us. Its not us who go out to find him.

On Wednesday evening, I witnessed something very different. I was in my office that afternoon, having just returned from Florida. The desk was piled high and I was certainly not feeling 100%. My brother told me that Bunny Escava was on the phone. Now when Bunny calls, one needs to drop everything. Bunny is a man who dedicates his life to acts of charity and kindness. Eight hours each day while most of us work, he does work for others and only after that does he do work for himself. For the last decade, he was my dad's partner in running the Ahi Ezer organization with schools and synagogues, senior housing, old age home, Torah center, learning programs, the biggest meals on wheels in the city and so much more. Today Bunny is the President and raises money for them and others including the

Center. He works tirelessly and should be blessed for his efforts.

Bunny told me that he received a call from Sam Domb. Sam wanted me to attend his dinner at Colbeh that night. I would have rather said no, but I couldn't. I know Sam from the Synagogue and have tremendous Hakarat HaTov to him for all he did to help everyone in need following Superstorm Sandy.

I walked into Colbeh at 6:45. There must have been 100 plus rabbis, principals and presidents. The ladies in their dresses and the men in their suits, ties and wide brimmed hats; and me in a shirt and pants. Uh Oh! I saw Bunny, spoke to Sam and his grandson for a few moments. Michael Landau gave me a big hug. I said hello to some of the rabbis. I hoped to sneak out while everyone sat, but continued to speak with Sam, Bunny and Jack Avital as they made their way to the head of a 100 foot table. With no other seats available and my path to the exit blocked, Sam put me in his seat as he stood at the lectern. Those who knew me must have wondered what I was doing at the head of the table and those who didn't must have wondered who the jacketless guy was sitting in Sam's seat while Sam finally sat next to me. As Harry Skydell spoke and mentioned Sam's help during Sandy, Sam reached over and gave me a hug.

The night was about Jewish education and Sam's dedication to our children and to our schools and his desire to see every child get the education he deserves. Sam never had that opportunity. At five years old, the Nazis came to town and evacuated everyone to a pit on the outskirts where everyone was killed. Sam was pulled away by a ten year old, perhaps some human angel who he never saw again. And this little boy spent the next six years of his life surviving. It is beyond imagination to picture a little five year old boy alone and against all odds. The education he missed out on was the gift he wished to give.

Then Sam got up to speak and to encourage each of us. He told a story of a little boy walking along the shore as the tide went out leaving thousands of starfish on the beach. He tossed them back in, one by one. When a man told him that he couldn't possibly save all of them, he lifted one up, tossed it back in the water and replied. "That may be true, but I just saved that little guy!" Each child we throw back into the water, into Torah and into life is a future world unto its own. If we can't save everyone, we must save everyone we can.

He then called up the different rabbis, principals and presidents in attendance with a check for \$75,000 to

this one and a check for \$100,000 to that one. All told, he handed out 1.3 million dollars that evening. And he does this every year. Each check came with one demand. Take in more children!

I was blown away. As Sam finished handing out checks, I found the opportunity to thank him and to sneak away. I had a learning session planned and didn't want to miss out. I also didn't need to stay for dinner and most important Sam's wife had come in so I needed to give Sam his seat back as reluctant as he was to take it from me.

As I walked west along 39th Street towards the subway, I thought about what I had been privileged to witness. Bunny mentioned that he would have loved to bring my dad. Yes, I thought, my dad would have loved to see this. Here the collectors didn't come to Sam, Sam came to them. He invited them to be honored and to enjoy dinner and handed each group a check. My dad would have told me to learn from what I saw because this was truly emulating Hashem and fulfilling our mission as people of Chesed.

Sam, Chazak Ubaruch!  
David Bibi

#### **YOM HAZIKARON: 23,447 z"l Rabbi Yosef Bitton**

We commemorate today Yom Hazikaron ("The Day of Remembrance" or "Memorial day") honoring the memory of the soldiers of the Israeli army who sacrificed their lives for the establishment of the State of Israel and its continued existence.

The young soldiers who gave their lives in the wars of Israel are the greatest heroes of Israel. "The silver platter" on which the State of Israel was delivered to us. As Rabbi Eliezer Melamed says, "these soldiers, most of them very young, sacrificed everything, so that we can have our land, where we can fulfill our greatest dream, all AM ISRAEL returning to their homeland to serve HaShem ... we should be inspired by their sacrifice and devotion to sanctify the name of God (leqaddesh shem shamayim)."

Today, in Israel, tens of thousands of people attend local cemeteries to mourn for their children, grandchildren, parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends. In the morning, at 11.00 am, a siren sounds throughout the country. Everything and everyone stops for two minutes: people, cars, businesses, public transportation, etc. to honor the memory of the fallen heroes and victims of terror.

This year we honor the memory of 23,447 soldiers and victims of terrorism who fell in Israel's wars or

terrorist attacks since the War of Independence in 1948 to the present day. Sixty eight new victims were added since last year's Yom haZikaron. In addition, fifty-nine disabled veterans who served in the Israeli army, mostly young, died as a result of their condition.

Today, there are 9,442 parents who have lost children, 4,917 widows and 1,948 orphans, according to interior ministry of Israel.

### Summary of the Perasha

#### Kedoshim - Holiness regarding the Jewish people (51 Mitsvot)

- 1- Kedoshim tihiu, fearing parents, idol worship, pigool, lechet, shichecha, pe'ah, stealing, lying, false witness, withholding wages, cursing, placing a stumbling block...
- 2- Perverting judgement, rechiloot, hating your brother in your heart, admonishing your fellow, taking revenge or having a grudge, love your fellow as yourself, kilayim, ...
- 3- Orlah, lo tochloo al ha'dam, destroying the hair of your beard, tattoos, harlotry, fearing the sanctuary, sorcery, standing for a seyba and zaken, being honest in weights and measures...
- 4- Don't harass the convert, don't distort justice in regards to weights and measures
- 5- The punishment for one who worships the avoda zara of molech and raising souls through ovot or yid'onim
- 6- The punishment for the forbidden relationships mentioned in Acharey Mot
- 7- The promise from Hashem that if we go in his ways and separate from unkosher food and illicit relations he will bless us with a land of milk and honey

#### FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER

#### "You shall be holy for holy am I, Hashem your G-d." (Vayikra 19:2)

Our perashah contains many misvot. The first Rashi on the perashah says: "Speak to the entire assembly of the children of Israel, this teaches us that this portion of the Torah was said at a gathering of the entire assembly of Israel, because the majority of the essentials of the Torah depend upon it." The Gur Aryeh explains that other portions of the Torah were also taught by Moshe Rabenu to the entire people of Israel. However, individuals had the right to be absent if they wished, but here every individual had to be present.

The sefer Tiferet Yonatan (quoted in "Hame'ir") asks what was special about the perashah of Kedoshim that Hashem commanded everyone to be present? He answers that the command to be

holy might be misunderstood. One might separate himself from worldly life in order to be holy. But if everyone would be ascetics, the nature of the world would not continue. Our Sages address this point by saying .rt lrs og jru, sunk, vph - Torah is good when it is combined with the way of the world. The trick is that all people can become holy, and the nature of the world maintained.

It's possible for a person to separate himself from the world and live alone and he will not transgress the laws of lashon hara, because he has no one to talk to. He will not violate the sin of "Do not follow your eyes to see immoral things," because he has no one to look at! He is alone!

This was not Hashem's intent when he commanded us to be holy, which means to be separate. Hashem commanded us to be holy while we mix with people (which is much more difficult). That's why Hashem commanded Moshe to make sure everyone comes, men, women and children. When all the people are together in one place, precisely then Hashem wants us to be holy. Rabbi Reuven Semah

#### "You shall be holy" (Vayikra 19:2)

When we think of the term "holiness" we tend to associate it with ascetic behavior, such as fasting and abstaining from the regular activities of this world. This perashah teaches us otherwise. The Torah commands us to be holy and then immediately exhorts us to honor our parents, to pay our bills on time, not to embarrass others and a host of laws which contribute to peace and harmony amongst our people. Our concept of holiness is living a life which is very active in the society in which we live, but living it in a way which will make our stay in this world a meaningful one. If we think about others when we do our thing, not only by not hurting them but by helping and assisting them, this leads to holiness. All of the misvot, whether between man and Hashem or man to man, lead a person to "kedushah" - holiness. That's why all the blessings prior to the misvot have the words "Asher kideshanu b'misvotav - Who has sanctified us with His misvot." Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

#### RABBI ELI MANSOUR Parenting and Holiness

Parashat Kedoshim begins with the command of "Kedoshim Tiheyu" – "You shall be holy." In the very next verse, the Torah admonishes us to respect our parents: "Each person among you shall revere his mother and his father..." What connection might there be between these two commands? Why would the Torah juxtapose the Misva of "Kedusha" – "holiness" – with the command to respect one's parents?

One answer that has been given is based upon the famous episode of Yosef and Potifar's wife. As we read in the Book of Bereshit (chapter 39), Yosef was sold as a slave and served a nobleman in Egypt named Potifar. Yosef was seventeen years old and very attractive, and Potifar's wife attempted to seduce him. Each day, she spoke to him and lured him, but he resisted her efforts. Finally, at one point, his passions nearly overcame him, and he was prepared to succumb to temptation. The Sages tell us that at that moment, he saw an image of his saintly father, Yaakov. As soon as Yosef saw this image, he withdrew and ran out of Potifar's home.

It is hard for us to imagine how difficult a test this was for Yosef. He was a teenage boy, all alone in a foreign country, without his family and without any Jewish community. There was nothing to stop him from committing this act of immorality. But he received strength to withstand temptation from the image of his father. When he saw Yaakov, he immediately came to his senses and recoiled. At that moment, he could not see himself betraying his upbringing, going against what his father taught him and represented, by committing an act of adultery. That image saved Yosef from a grave transgression that would have left an eternal stain on his soul.

This may very well be the basis of the connection indicated by the Torah between "Kedoshim Tiheyu" and respecting parents. If children grow with respect for their parents, then this respect will help ensure their "Kedusha," their ability to achieve and maintain holiness. When parents conduct themselves in a respectable, becoming manner, serving as role models of dignity, discipline and religious commitment, then the children will have this image before them throughout their lives. And this image will serve as a model for them to follow even in the face of the lures and temptations that they will inevitably confront. In order to remain "Kedoshim," children must be given an "image" that they respect and admire. As in the case of Yosef, this image will continue to guide and inspire them even long after they become adults and move away from their parents' home.

Thus, the obligation and challenge of "Kedoshim Tiheyu" very closely relates to our obligation and challenge as parents. We must be models of "Kedusha" for our children, so that when they are put to the test, they will have an image of holiness to protect them and direct them toward the proper choices in life.

## VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

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### Hashem is the Shadchan By Rabbi David Ashear

I read a remarkable story told by Rabbi Nachman Seltzer. One day, a man who was friendly with Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach saw him on the street, and Reb Shlomo invited him to a wedding that was taking place in his Shul that night. He said that it would be a big Mitzva to attend this wedding, as there was a special story behind it. The man happily agreed and stayed to the very end. At that point, Rabbi Carlebach sat him down and told him the following story.

A while back, he was on a flight and got up to ask one of the flight attendants for a drink. To his amazement, he saw the stewardess standing in the back, praying intensely with a Siddur in her hand. After she finished the Amidah, he said, "I guess you were praying. I never met a religious stewardess before." She said, "Actually, I converted to Judaism," and she proceeded to tell the Rabbi her story. She was very sincere and had a real passion for religion.

A short while later, she approached the Rabbi's seat and asked him if he could possibly help her. After she had been Jewish for some time, her friend set her up with a nice religious man. After a few dates, it was obvious that they were perfect for each other. However, when his parents found out that she was a convert, they forbade their son from seeing her anymore.

The rabbi said, "I feel very bad. What could I do to help?" She replied, "Maybe if you give his father a call, you could change his mind."

When he called, the father heard the suggestion and immediately responded, "It is not subject to discussion. I have only one son, and being that I went through the war, I have a responsibility to my family who perished to carry on the tradition in the best way. This does not include my son marrying a girl who just became Jewish a few months ago. I don't know her intentions. I just want my son to marry a Jewish girl from a regular Jewish family like us."

The Rabbi tried his best to convince the father, offering to verify that she was truly sincere. Nonetheless, he was not successful. It seemed that the case was closed.

Several months later, Rabbi Carlebach received a phone call from the stewardess, explaining that there were some new developments. Two days before, she received a phone call informing her that her mother was on her deathbed. They had

not been in touch since she made the decision to change her life, and she did not even know that her mother was sick.

When she arrived, her mother made a strange request. "Please promise to bury me in Jewish cemetery." It did not make any sense. She asked her mother, "Why? And why are you asking me? Ask Dad to do it."

The mother replied, "I can't trust him to do it. You see, we never told you, but really, we are Jewish. After we survived the Holocaust and made it to America, we made a firm commitment never to reveal that we were Jewish. Your father was always worried that there would come a time when it would happen again here. We raised you the way we did, because we thought it would be for your benefit.

However, it ended up being a mistake. Please, bury me like a Jew."

Now, she asked Rabbi Carlebach to please call back that father and explain to him that she was, in fact, Jewish from birth. The Rabbi called, but the father was very skeptical.

"She's making this whole thing up just to marry my son. I'm not falling for this."

"Please," said the Rabbi, "Let's be reasonable. What if I come to your house with her and her father? This way you will be able to meet them and I am sure you will be convinced."

The father agreed and the three of them arrived at the house. When the door opened, the two fathers looked at each other in shock. "Yaakov is that really you?" the stewardess's father whispered. "Moshe?" whispered the boy's father.

Suddenly, they were in each other's arms, laughing and crying, hardly daring to believe what had just transpired. These two men had been childhood friends who grew up together in the same shtetl.

"Yaakov," said Moshe, "Do you remember our pact?"

"Remind me."

"We promised one another that when we get married and have children of our own..."

"Oh yes," interrupted Yaakov. "We promised that if one of us had a boy and the other a girl, we would marry them off to each other."

"Well then," Yaakov laughed, "It looks like it's time to keep our promise."

Rabbi Carlebach concluded, "That is how we ended up dancing at this wedding tonight.

Hashem brings people together in wondrous ways. Never give up. We can always be helped.

Reprinted from the April 13, 2016 email of Daily Emunah via Daniel Keren's Shabbos Stories

## Rabbi Wein MEMORIAL DAYS

The last days of April and the beginning days of May are days of memory and remembrance here in Israel. The last Monday in May is Memorial Day in the United States. Official days of remembrance are the feeble attempts of nations and governments to somehow strengthen and revitalize national memory. They recall for us difficult times, great human sacrifice and always attempt to teach a lesson from previous generations to the next.

The problem with these days is that they are all formalized, run by committees and usually not that meaningful to the general populace, which only use them as a well anticipated day off from work. Because of this, much of the purpose of the days of remembrance and memory is lost in the barbecue and the beach. But one should not be too cynical about the value of these days of memory because without them there would be no background to our current lives and little understanding of the issues that we face.

It is obvious to all, even after more than seventy years have passed, that the events of World War II and the Holocaust still haunt us. They not only trouble the Jewish people, its primary victim, but they disturb the world generally and provoke uncertainty, fear, hatred and controversy.

The Holocaust deniers are, in reality, only trying to get rid of this ghost that haunts civilization till today. But, as the current world situation shows us, the possibility for genocide, Holocaust and brazen inhumanity still remains part of our national and personal lives. Memorializing the Holocaust with a day of observance only intensifies the presence of this disturbing memory that gives our generation no peace or respite.

The day commemorating the founding of the State of Israel sixty-eight years ago, represents to me not so much what occurred but what it prevented from occurring. Having lived through the last half of the 1940s I clearly remember how desperate the situation of the Jewish people the world over was at that time. No one was optimistic about our future. All of the wise savants predicted the conquest of then Palestine by the invading armies and Arab militia.

Today there are many that say that it was a foregone conclusion that Israel would survive and win its war of independence. But many times these statements are written not only in perfect hindsight but also with an intended agenda attached to them.

In May 1948 when I was a young student in Chicago, our fears were palpable and our hopes very limited as to the fate of our people then fighting for their lives in the new state of Israel. To those who were not alive at that time, Israel Independence Day is a day of celebration and leisure. But to those of us who were present on the original first Israel Independence Day it remains a day of wonder and joyful surprise. Israel became the driving force in the Jewish world, the center of Torah and Judaism, and in its own way, a glimmer of light unto the nations of the world. Without it, I hazard to say, the Jewish world today would be far smaller, far weaker, far more secular and in greater danger of survival.

The road has not been easy and the cost very dear.....and the butcher still demands payment on a regular basis throughout the Jewish world. Nevertheless, we have every cause for optimism. These days of remembrance reminds us not only of the dangers through which we have passed but also of the fortitude and determination of the Jewish people to survive and prosper.

I have often pointed out that throughout human history there have been no great national comebacks. Rome will never again be an empire, nor will Great Britain rule over a quarter of the globe's surface again. History's inexorable rule has been that gone is gone.

These days of remembrance remind us of our exceptionalism as a people. We have come back in a fashion so remarkable that it truly staggers the imagination. The Holocaust haunts us but it has not destroyed us. Much of Russian Jewry escaped to better lives and better times and places. Anti-Semitism and anti-Israel rhetoric abounds but in no way does this inhibit the growth of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. These are important things to remember and contemplate during this period of national memory. These realizations will stand us in a very good stead as we continue on our future path of growth, accomplishment and holiness.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks In Search of Jewish Identity**

The other day I was having a conversation with a Jewish intellectual and the question came up, as it often does, as to the nature of Jewish identity. What are we? What makes us Jewish? This has been one of the persisting debates about Jewish life ever since the nineteenth century. Until then, people by and large knew who and what Jews were. They were the heirs of an ancient nation who, in the Sinai desert

long ago, made a covenant with God and, with greater or lesser success, tried to live by it ever since. They were God's people.

Needless to say, this upset others. The Greeks thought they were the superior race. They called non-Greeks "barbarians," a word intended to resemble the sound made by sheep. The Romans likewise thought themselves better than others, Christians and Muslims both held, in their different ways, that they, not the Jews, were the true chosen of God. The result was many centuries of persecution. So when Jews were given the chance to become citizens of the newly secular nation states of Europe, they seized it with open arms. In many cases they abandoned their faith and religious practice. But they were still regarded as Jews.

What, though, did this mean? It could not mean that they were a people dedicated to God, since many of them no longer believed in God or acted as if they did. So it came to mean a race. Benjamin Disraeli, converted to Christianity by his father as a young child, thought of his identity in those terms. He once wrote, "All is race -- there is no other truth,"[1] and said about himself, in response to a taunt by the Irish politician Daniel O'Connell, "Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the right honorable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the temple of Solomon."

The trouble was that hostility to Jews did not cease despite all that Europe claimed by way of enlightenment, reason, the pursuit of science and emancipation. It could now, though, no longer be defined by religion, since neither Jews nor Europeans used that as the basis of identity. So Jews became hated for their race, and in the 1870s a new word was coined to express this: antisemitism. This was dangerous. So long as Jews were defined by religion, Christians could work to convert them. You can change your religion. But you cannot change your race. Anti-Semites could only work, therefore, for the expulsion or extermination of the Jews.

Ever since the Holocaust it has become taboo to use the word "race" in polite society in the West. Yet secular Jewish identity persists, and there seems no other way of referring to it. So a new term has come to be used instead: ethnicity, which means roughly what "race" meant in the nineteenth century. The Wikipedia definition of ethnicity is "a category of people who identify with each other based on common ancestral, social, cultural, or national experiences."

The trouble is that ethnicity is where we came from,

not where we are going to. It involves culture and cuisine, a set of memories meaningful to parents but ever less so to their children. In any case, there is no one Jewish ethnicity: there are ethnicities in the plural. That is what makes Sefardi Jews different from their Ashkenazi cousins, and Sefardi Jews from North Africa and the Middle East different from those whose families originally came from Spain and Portugal.

Besides which, what is often thought of as Jewish ethnicity is often not even Jewish in origin. It is a lingering trace of what Jews absorbed from a local non-Jewish culture: Polish dress, Russian music, North African food, and the German-Jewish dialect known as Yiddish along with its Spanish-Jewish counterpart, Ladino. Ethnicity is often a set of borrowings thought of as Jewish because their origins have been forgotten.

Judaism is not an ethnicity and Jews are not an ethnic group. Go to the Western Wall in Jerusalem and you will see Jews of every colour and culture under the sun, the Beta Israel from Ethiopia, the Bene Israel from India, Bukharan Jews from central Asia, Iraqi, Berber, Egyptian, Kurdish and Libyan Jews, the Temanim from Yemen, alongside American Jews from Russia, South African Jews from Lithuania, and British Jews from German-speaking Poland. Their food, music, dress, customs and conventions are all different. Jewishness is not an ethnicity but a bricolage of multiple ethnicities.

Besides which, ethnicity does not last. If Jews are merely an ethnic group, they will experience the fate of all such groups, which is that they disappear over time. Like the grandchildren of Irish, Polish, German and Norwegian immigrants to America, they merge into the melting pot. Ethnicity lasts for three generations, for as long as children can remember immigrant grandparents and their distinctive ways. Then it begins to fade, for there is no reason for it not to. If Jews had been no more than an ethnicity, they would have died out long ago, along with the Canaanites, Perizzites and Jebusites, known only to students of antiquity and having left no mark on the civilisation of the West.

So when, in 2000, a British Jewish research institute proposed that Jews in Britain be defined as an ethnic group and not a religious community, it took a non-Jewish journalist, Andrew Marr, to state the obvious: 'All this is shallow water,' he wrote, 'and the further in you wade, the shallower it gets.' He continued:

The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us. They have had their Bible, one of the great

imaginative works of the human spirit. They have been victim of the worst modernity can do, a mirror for Western madness. Above all they have had the story of their cultural and genetic survival from the Roman Empire to the 2000s, weaving and thriving amid uncomprehending, hostile European tribes.

This story, their post-Bible, their epic of bodies, not words, involved an intense competitive hardening of generations which threw up, in the end, a blaze of individual geniuses in Europe and America. Outside painting, Morris dancing and rap music, it's hard to think of many areas of Western endeavour where Jews haven't been disproportionately successful. For non-Jews, who don't believe in a people being chosen by God, the lesson is that generations of people living on their wits and hard work, outside the more comfortable mainstream certainties, will seed Einsteins and Wittgensteins, Trotskys and Seiffs. Culture matters . . . The Jews really have been different; they have enriched the world and challenged it.[2]

Marr himself is neither Jewish nor a religious believer, but his insight points us in the direction of this week's parsha, which contains one of the most important sentences in Judaism: "Speak to the whole assembly of Israel and say to them: Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." Jews were and remain the people summoned to holiness.

What does this mean? Rashi reads it in context. The previous chapter was about forbidden sexual relationships. So is the next chapter. So he understands it as meaning, be careful not to put yourself in the way of temptation to forbidden sex. Ramban reads it more broadly. The Torah forbids certain activities and permits others. When it says "Be holy" it means, according to Ramban, practice self-restraint even in the domain of the permitted. Don't be a glutton, even if what you are eating is kosher. Don't be an alcoholic even if what you are drinking is kosher wine. Don't be, in his famous phrase, a naval bireslut ha-Torah, "a scoundrel with Torah license."

These are localised interpretations. They are what the verse means in its immediate context. But it clearly means something larger as well, and the chapter itself tells us what this is. To be holy is to love your neighbour and to love the stranger. It means not stealing, lying, or deceiving others. It means not standing idly by when someone else's life is in danger. It means not cursing the deaf or putting a stumbling block before the blind, that is, insulting or taking advantage of others even when they are completely unaware of it – because God is not

unaware of it.

It means not planting your field with different kinds of seed, not crossbreeding your livestock or wearing clothes made of a forbidden mixture of wool and linen—or as we would put it nowadays, respecting the integrity of the environment. It means not conforming with whatever happens to be the idolatry of the time – and every age has its idols. It means being honest in business, doing justice, treating your employees well, and sharing your blessings (in those days, parts of the harvest) with others.

It means not hating people, not bearing a grudge or taking revenge. If someone has done you wrong, don't hate them. Remonstrate with them. Let them know what they have done and how it has hurt you, give them a chance to apologise and make amends, and then forgive them.

Above all, "Be holy" means, "Have the courage to be different." That is the root meaning of kadosh in Hebrew. It means something distinctive and set apart. "Be holy for I the Lord your God am holy" is one of the most counter-intuitive sentences in the whole of religious literature. How can we be like God? He is infinite, we are finite. He is eternal, we are mortal. He is vaster than the universe, we are a mere speck on its surface. Yet, says the Torah, in one respect we can be.

God is in but not of the world. So we are called on to be in but not of the world. We don't worship nature. We don't follow fashion. We don't behave like everyone else just because everyone else does. We don't conform. We dance to a different music. We don't live in the present. We remember our people's past and help build our people's future. Not by accident does the word kadosh also have the meaning of marriage, kiddushin, because to marry means to be faithful to one another, as God pledges himself to be faithful to us and we to him, even in the hard times.

To be holy means to bear witness to the presence of God in our, and our people's, lives. Israel – the Jewish people – is the people who in themselves give testimony to One beyond ourselves. To be Jewish means to live in the conscious presence of the God we can't see but can sense as the force within ourselves urging us to be more courageous, just and generous than ourselves. That's what Judaism's rituals are about: reminding us of the presence of the Divine.

Every individual on earth has an ethnicity. But only one people was ever asked collectively to be holy.

That, to me, is what it is to be a Jew.

[1] Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography (1852), p. 331.

[2] Andrew Marr, The Observer, Sunday May 14, 2000.

### **AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL "You shall be holy for I Hashem Your G-d am holy". 19:2**

Fundamentally this means: 'Think as I Think'.

The most important part of the personality is the mind.

Therefore we can most effectively emulate the holiness of Hashem by means of emulating His thoughts.

Everything in the Torah is an example of Hashem's thoughts, as He wishes us to think.

Therefore we study His words in order to acquire (what He shows us to be) His attitudes.

He regards Man as "the image of G-d" (Beresheet 1:27), and we should train our minds to think likewise.

He considers the people of Israel as His sons (Devarim 14:1), and we must gain that same attitude.

He desires kindness (Shemot 36:6; Michah 7:18) and so should we.

He hates immorality (Sanhedrin 93A), and so should we.

He considers His world as "Very Good" (Beresheet 1:31), and so should we.

R' Miller writes in 'Praise My Soul', re 'Ata Kadosh', Kadosh means Perfect

So, what am I thanking Hashem for?

3 thoughts:

1. for being able to serve You.

I am elevated by being known for serving the Greatest One. Eved Hashem.

2. You are my model to emulate. 13 Attributes/Midot.

3. I am creating my Olam Haba by thinking how Perfect/Great You are.

Adapted from "A Kingdom of Cohanim" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L

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