YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***Bein Adam Le-chavero*: Ethics of Interpersonal Conduct**

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**Shiur #22: *“Kedoshim Tihyu”* II: The Role Model and Social Mindfulness**

In last week’s lesson, we discussed the divine imperative of *“Kedoshim tihyu,”* “You shall be holy” *(Vayikra* 19:2), directing man towards a life of emulating God in all that he does. Elements of *kedusha* (holiness) may also be found in Judaism’s relationship to the social sphere. We noted last week a couple of unique elements of the mitzva of *“Kedoshim tihyu*”: it is addressed to the entire assembly of the Jewish people and it predicates the requirement to become *kedoshim* on God’s being *kadosh*.

In order to further understand this significant mitzva, we must define the nature of *kedusha*. In many contexts, it seems that *kedusha* entails separateness (*perishut*), as explained by Rav Meir Twersky, in his essay, [“You Shall Be Holy”:](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2003/parsha/rtwe_kedoshim.html)

What, however, does a life of *Kedusha* entail? Let us approach this question etymologically. *Kedusha* etymologically denotes separateness (*see* commentary of Malbim to Vayikra 19:2). Hence, *HaKadosh baruch hu* who is transcendent and infinite is described as *Kadosh*. … *Kedusha* etymologically also denotes consecration, designation… Now clearly the concepts of separateness and consecration are interrelated, and, in reality, *Kedusha* has but one etymology. Consecration pre-supposes separateness. …

To repeat our original question: what does a life of *Kedusha* entail? A focused, consecrated life. But focus and consecration perforce assume separateness. Separating oneself from pursuit of pleasure, separateness from careerism, and the like. In a word, separating oneself from the mundane as an end unto itself and all forms of egotism. Such separateness facilitates and fosters consecration. Consecrating oneself - one's ambitions, energies, talents, and above all, time - to *Hashem Yisborach*.

Viewing *kedusha* as consecrated separateness can be understood as the sole drive of the Jew who wants to fulfill the directive of “*Kedoshim tihyu.*” Thus, the Talmud (*Taanit* 11a) reports of the nazirite:

R. Elazar says: “He is termed holy, as it is said, ‘He shall be holy, he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long’ (*Bamidbar* 6:5). If this man, who denied himself wine, only is termed holy, how much more so he who denies himself the enjoyment of many things!”

If a nazirite is called “*kadosh*” because he separates from the world and from bodily pleasures, this, to some degree, must be the main purpose of aspiring to *kedusha*.

While one cannot deny the importance of separating oneself in order to achieve *kedusha*, a number of commentators explain certain elements of the *kedusha* imperative in such a way as to limit one’s *perishut*. They state unequivocally that it is clear that when we speak of separateness, this concept is expressed in terms of mingling with others and positively expressing Jewish character in society.

A life of *kedusha* is a life that will bring about *kiddush Ha-shem*, a sanctification of God’s name, in all of man’s endeavors. This starts first and foremost with developing one’s character, which we began to discuss in last week’s lesson. “*Kedoshim tihyu*” requires modeling oneself after God and thereby inculcating His ways. It also includes living in society as a holy individual rather than separating from it.

**A Life of *Kedusha***

Jewish holiness is a holiness of life. We do not view martyrdom as the goal of every child; we do not worship the *shaheed.* Rather, we place on a pedestal the principle *“*You shall live by them*”* (*Vayikra* 18:5), that one must survive by the *mitzvot*. As the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 74a) teaches, “‘You shall live by them’ — not die by them.” This imperative, which is only overridden under the most extreme conditions, also has a positive implication: to live through the *mitzvot*.

This idea of living through the *mitzvot* is further explored in the teachings of the Kotzker Rebbe. According to him, one must sanctify oneself within society, while realizing that one cannot be an angel. He explains the verse “And holy people you shall be for Me” (*Shemot* 22:30) as a directive to be “*heilige mentschen*,” Yiddish for sanctified human beings.

The Ketav Sofer (*Vayikra* 19:1) spells out the meaning of being holy like God. On the one hand, God is completely separate from this world, truly holy, as He is incomprehensible in the definitive terms of our universe. Yet while God is above the world, He also fills the world, as the entire universe is full of His glory (*Yeshayahu* 6:3).

As Seforno notes, man is created in God’s image; this allows him to create *kedusha* as well, by limitations and separations. The Seforno explains that all the commandments mentioned in the previous chapters, detailing the forbidden foods etc., are not goals in their own right.

He now says that the purpose of all these warnings is that [the people] be holy. This is in order that they may imitate their Creator as much as possible, as was the original intent when man was created, as it says “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (*Bereishit* 1:26)... And it is fitting that you be like Me, as much as possible, in mind and deed… (Seforno *Vayikra* 19:2)

The Chatam Sofer explains similarly, noting the fact that the laws here were taught during a general assembly. He explains that, as Rashi notes, *“Kedoshim tihyu”* involves *perishut*. He explains that though separation from the material world is necessary for *kedusha*, there is more to the story:

One should not conclude that the Torah advocates complete isolation from one’s environment. On the contrary, the Torah’s ideal is to interact with one’s contemporaries and thereby bring them closer to Torah. As a result of being so immersed in disseminating Torah, it is entirely possible that one’s own spiritual growth may suffer. Nonetheless, a truly holy person persists in transmitting Torah among the masses, regardless of the spiritual sacrifice involved… The fact that *Parashat Kedoshim* was said in a public assembly indicates that *kedusha* requires a commitment to make an impact on others.

For a Torah nation to exist, the Chatam Sofer explains, it must have a physical existence, a body, even though it is the soul which is the source of all potential. This requires a great deal of immersion into general affairs, teaching and disseminating Torah, until the nation achieves its ideal of creating a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (*Shemot* 19:6).

In the Hebrew edition of his commentary, *Torat Moshe*, his son, Rav Shimon Sofer, is quoted in a letter explaining that the proper model for a life of *kedusha* is *perishut* in private and a public posture that is more compatible with society’s expectations of engagement with the world.

Along the lines of the recommendation found in *Chovot Ha-levavot,* that one should observe “mourning in private and present a happy countenance in public,” the ChatamSofer himself privately separated himself from worldly desire; internally, he shunned the physical. Nevertheless, the outside world could not detect his unique stature, for he did not advertise his inner feelings.

This fulfills the directive of being *kadosh* like God. God towers above the universe, but He is involved through His Providence. Similarly, we may endeavor to leave an impact on our peers while maintaining distance from the materialism of the world.

The Chatam Sofer, in his commentary on *Parashat Kedoshim*, further develops this idea by explaining that this lies at the heart of the distinction between the lives of Chanokh, the great-grandfather of Noach, and his descendant, our patriarch Avraham.

The life of Chanokh is a classic example of the sheer impossibility of human beings trying to emulate God by living in isolation. Chanokh, who in his own personal life attained a level of great religious devotion, was so removed from this world that we may deduce that he turned a blind eye to the many faults of his contemporaries, and eventually he left this world in the guise of an angel.

On the other hand, if we are looking for a role model of *kedusha* whom we can emulate, let us turn to Avraham Avinu. Despite his exalted status, he mingled with his contemporaries and had a great impact on them. It is this aspect of *kedusha*, concern for the spiritual welfare of others (while maintaining high personal standards), that is the essence of *“Kedoshim tihyu.”*

**Applicable to All**

The verse states: “Speak to the **entire assembly** of the Israelites and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for holy am I, Lord your God.’” The Torah assures us that every one of us is capable of achieving *kedusha* "for holy am I, Lord your God." *Kedusha* is attainable for all; it is not restricted to the gifted or popular, but the heritage of all Jews.

The Or Ha-chayim, who interestingly enough is also referred to as “*Ha*-*kadosh*,” comments that the verses imply that everyone was gathered together for the directive of *“Kedoshim tihyu”* because *kedusha* is for everyone; it exists not only in action, but in thought as well:

…This is the meaning of our verse: if you are presented with an opportunity to commit a sin and you refrain from taking advantage of that opportunity, you have fulfilled the commandment to be or to become holy. The reason God commanded Moshe to tell this commandment directly to the whole congregation of Israel was to inform them directly of this and to show them how easy it was to be counted amongst the people described as holy.

The Chatam Sofer says similarly that *kedusha* applies equally to men and women; there are different approaches, but the same message of attaining a life of *kedusha*.

 If *kedusha* is applicable to all, this also seems to imply that one should not have to separate himself totally from the world or from the Jewish people in order to become *kadosh*. Certainly, at some points, solitude might be called for, but the pursuit of *kedusha* can be a public, even national activity.

This is the paradox of the Jewish people in general, who on the one hand are separated from the rest of the world, as a nation which dwells separately (*Bamidbar* 23:9) which nevertheless is meant to affect the world as a “light unto the nations.” (*Yeshayahu* 42:6) Similarly, the entire tribe of Levi was separated from the rest of the Jewish people, but they were their teachers as well (Rambam, *Hilkhot Shemitta Ve-yovel* 13:12).

*Kedusha* involves separating oneself in deed from the masses, but being an active member of society, a role model. Any separation and isolation in the process is designed only to allow one to have a greater impact on society upon one’s return.

Why does a Jew not have to escape the world to embrace *kedusha*? For the Jew, there is no sense of despair and hatred towards the world. We understand that the world created by God is very good (*Bereishit* 1:31), one must nevertheless learn to control the physical and not be controlled by it. *Kedusha* entails the ability to use the world for its holy causes. Indeed, according to Kabbalistic teachings, this allows one to reveal the divine sparks that abound in every creation.

On this issue, Judaism distinguishes itself in its directive to be holy. Holiness is not to be defined as running away from the world and the physical; holiness requires being a part of society — to allow holiness into everyday life and to uncover the holiness inherent in it.

Rav Yonatan Eybeschütz (*Tiferet Yonatan, Parashat Kedoshim*) writes that the directive of *“Kedoshim tihyu”* does not meant to withdraw from society and live as a hermit, abstaining from all worldly enterprise; on the contrary, this lesson was taught in front of the whole assembly to clarify that holiness must be in consonance with society.

The Sages denounced such behavior (abstinence). Indeed, those who worship God perfectly must in their conduct please both God and their fellow beings, rather than renouncing the accepted social and civic norms. Indeed, widespread withdrawal undermines the natural order, ruins civilizations and destroys the fabric of our nation.

This is the meaning of the rabbinic dictum (*Avot* 2:2): “Well-founded is the Torah in conjunction with worldly occupation.” Hence, all individual abstention must accord with the capacity of the entire nation. On the other hand, any regimen restricted to the individual, which overburdens the nation as a whole, actually contradicts perfection.

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zt”l* explains how the halakhic expressions of *kedusha* teach us that even though it might seem that the easiest way to achieve holiness is by running away from an imperfect society and living in isolation, holiness is in fact only expressed in the presence of an assembly.

This principle totally denies the mystics’ assumption that ecstasy is possible only in a state of absolute withdrawal. On the contrary, Judaism states that God joins with the individual only in the merit of the community which is loyal to Him and seeks Him. If man separates himself from the community, he is not worthy of cleaving to God. The prayers exalting God’s holiness may not be uttered unless ten men are present- “And I will be sanctified among the children of Israel” (*Vayikra* 22:32). Judaism has grasped the importance and influence of the environment… ("*U-vikkashtem Mi-sham*,” p. 89)

***Kiddush Ha-shem* — Leading an Exemplary Life:**

This concept of being *kadosh* has tremendous relevance for the way an individual acts as well. The name of God is desecrated when a person who studies Torah fails to relate to other people in a fitting manner. The sanctification of His name is just the opposite: when the name of Heaven becomes beloved through man’s personal example, this is *kiddush Ha-shem*.

As it was taught [in a *beraita*]: "’You shall love the Lord your God’ (*Devarim* 6:5) — this means that the name of Heaven should become beloved through you.

“[This means that] one should read [Scripture], study [Mishna] and serve Torah scholars, and his dealings with people should be conducted in a pleasant manner. What should people say about him? "Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah; fortunate is his teacher who taught him Torah. Woe unto people who do not learn Torah. This person who learned Torah — see how pleasant are his ways, how refined are his deeds!" Regarding him Scripture says: ‘[God] said to me, “You are My servant, Israel, through whom I am glorified”’ (*Yeshayahu* 49:3).” (*Yoma* 86a)

However, the opposite is also true. The same way one can engender *kedusha*, they can also desecrate the name of God by creating the impression that adherents to the Torah are immoral.

“As for one who learns [Scripture], studies [Mishna] and serves Torah scholars, but his business transactions are not conducted faithfully, and whose manner of speaking with people is not pleasant — what do people say about him? "Woe unto his father who taught him Torah; woe unto his teacher who taught him Torah. See how perverse are his deeds and how ugly are his ways!" Regarding him, Scripture says: ‘[They came among the nations… and they profaned My holy name] when it was said of them, “These are the people of the Lord, but they departed His land"’ (*Yechezkel* 36:20).”

 Clearly, a special obligation falls upon those who study Torah to make the name of Heaven beloved to other people; one who strives to live a life of *kedusha* should do so in a way that others may view positively. This idea underlies the laws regarding the dress of a Torah scholar (*Hilkhot Deot,* ch. 5). A Torah scholar must be presentable so that people do not view his scholarship as an impediment to socially-accepted norms of cleanliness.

However, action is obviously more important than dress, specifically in the moral realm. In order for one to have a positive impact on others, he must perfect his character and develop exemplary *middot*. Nevertheless, even that is insufficient; one must constantly be on guard not to allow even his permitted activity to be misinterpreted in a way that would shed negative light on the Torah. Regarding the mitzva of *kiddush Ha-shem*, the Rambam (*Sefer Ha-mitzvot,* Positive 9) writes:

The idea of this mitzva is that we are commanded to publicize this true faith and to fear no one in doing so…

The Rambam goes on to describe that this includes the willingness to give one’s life in the face of a tyrant who orders a Jew to abandon his religion by worshiping idols, upon pain of death. However, in the description of the prohibition of desecrating the name of God, the Rambam is more explicit. The Rambam begins by noting that the prohibition has three parts, the third pertaining to particular individuals:

If a man known for his saintliness and uprightness does something which appears to be a transgression to the general populace — something which is unbecoming to him, though it may be [technically] permitted — he has desecrated the name [of God]… (*Sefer Ha-mitzvot,* Negative 63)

This is the “*Kedoshim* *tihyu*” imperative of “Sanctify yourself with what is permissible to you.” If any act can be misinterpreted by others as reflecting moral deficiency, then it must be carefully avoided.

Rav Yehuda Amital (*Jewish Values in a Changing World,* pp. 150-151) notes that the highest form of education is the one in which the teacher is not consciously instructing, nor is the student consciously learning. We may see it as similar to the Rambam’s hierarchy of charity (*Hilkhot Mattenot Aniyim*, ch. 10), in which the giver and recipient being unaware of each other’s identities is preferable. Rav Amital explains:

Every educational institution, by its very nature, has a built-in problem: the student knows who is teaching him, and the teacher knows who he is teaching. This situation - direct education of which both sides are fully conscious - frequently arouses internal opposition on the part of the student against accepting the teacher's world outlook and moral admonitions. This situation is liable to hurt the teacher as well, who, knowing that he is serving as a role model, may conduct himself in an unnatural manner. The greatest educational impact is achieved when the teacher is unaware that he is teaching and the student is unaware that he is learning. This is the meaning of "that the name of Heaven shall become beloved through you" - that a person through his ordinary conduct should bring about a sanctification of God's name, without even being aware that he is influencing others through his behavior.

**Rav Kook’s Stress on Imparting the Moral Teachings of the Torah**

Rav Kook stresses in his writing the importance of expressing the Moral perfection of the Torah. According to Rav Kook, the denial of God always begins with the immoral conduct of people who claim to represent the faith. He points out that those who deny God almost always begin not through criticism of God, but with criticism of the conduct of those who claim to believe in Him. It is such criticism that causes the loss of faith. Rav Kook therefore explains that the remedy for dealing with denial of God is the sanctification of His name:

There should be no place whatsoever for this fraudulent denial to spread in the world… But it comes with moral objections raised against unfit conduct seen among people of Torah and faith…

The basic cause for all the confusion, which brings evil into the world by way of evil ideas, is the sin of desecrating God's name. Corresponding to it is the great power of the sanctification of God's name, which issues forth from a Torah scholar who conducts his business dealings in a pleasant manner and speaks gently to others… For good and moral conduct, in the form of good actions and good traits practiced by righteous and God-fearing Torah scholars, constitutes the best way to remove the mistaken foundation of moral denial. (*Eder Ha-yakar,* p. 43)

In a similar vein, in the recently revealed work of Rav Kook, *Li-nvukhei Ha-dor* (ch. 3), he writes that we must look at the Torah with an understanding of the moral perfection of its teachings. By doing so, Rav Kook writes, we will succeed in understanding the Torah properly. This will enable us to live a life filled with proper devotion.

 *“Kedoshim tihyu”* is a directive aimed at the entire congregation, because holiness is attainable by all.  Though *Kedusha* entails separateness, and one might assume that the easiest way to achieve holiness is through isolating oneself from the world and society in general, it also mandates involvement.  A real life of *kedusha* is one which can be appreciated by others in society. Those who have come to a greater understanding of God must act more morally than others, as they are constant ambassadors, representing prominently a life of holiness.  This is the trademark of “a holy nation” which, through its distinction and separation, has the capacity to impact positively on all of mankind.