



In Memory  
of our beloved

## David Schwartz

who fell in battle  
27th day of the month of Tevet, 5784  
(8 January 2024)

David wrote thoughts on each of the weekly Torah readings taken from the core of the Torah that he studied in depth with his unique spirit. The Torah thoughts were originally published on the occasion of his marriage to Meital.

His Torah insights are shared now for the elevation of his pure soul and for the sanctification of his blessed memory

# Kedoshim

From "Le'David Barchi Nafshi" ("Of David, Bless the Lord, O My Soul")

Words of Torah according to the weekly Torah reading by David Schwartz, z"l

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Parasha Insights

The many Torah commandments in *Kedoshim* are like the plentiful seeds of a pomegranate, as the Hebrew expression goes. Nevertheless, with the help of God, I will focus on the first and most famous mitzvah, "You shall be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (19:2).

Rashi's (1040-1105) explanation of these words is well known to learned students of the Torah. "You shall be holy" - "This means separate yourselves from sexual immorality and sin, for in every case that you find laws litigating sexual morals in the Torah you find holiness is juxtaposed with it." The Ramban (1194-1270) similarly explains: "God gave a general directive to us to be holy and stay away from certain things ... even though those particular items may not have been expressly restricted by the Torah." (In other words, don't be a glutton even though it's permissible.) These two luminaries see the opening commandment as an admonition to us in order to prevent sin. I will offer another view that focuses on the inherently positive aspect of this mitzvah for human beings, rather than viewing it as only a warning. As the basis for this approach, let us look at how our teachers have explained the relationship between our people and God in Exodus 14.

At the time of leaving Egypt, God said to Moshe, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to travel forward." The holy sage Chaim ibn Attar (the *Or Hachaim*, 1696-1743) explains that God advises Moshe to tell Israel that they must perform an act of faith with all their hearts, such as by entering the Sea of Reeds before it was split. This act of faith would strengthen the attributes of mercy and love within God so that love would overcome strict justice. They could create a positive outcome. God asked Moses: "Why do you cry out to Me?" With this question, God was saying, "The matter is not entirely in My hands." It depends on you.

Similarly, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821) writes in the *Nefesh Hachaim* (1:9) that before

splitting the sea, God asked "Why do you cry out to me?" This means that they must trust completely in God and walk toward the sea. This would cause a miracle. The *Chofetz Chaim* (Yisroel Meir Kagan, 1838-1933) in his work *Shem Olam* (2:88) cites the *Vilna Gaon* (1720-1797) and explains: "And realize this, that the level of faith does not depend on the merits of good actions. As even if a person did not have adequate merits, but had only strengthened his faith in God, that strength of faith alone could protect him and secure God's grace."

The hasidic Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev (1740-1809) explains: "If a person has faith that God will fulfill his needs, also in the heavens above they will surely answer all of his requests." As the Ramban had explained: "Even if you are aware of your wickedness, nevertheless trust in God, because He is Merciful and He will have mercy on you."

We see above that the great hassidic masters and also their critics, the *mitnagdim*, emphasized the power of faith to bring about miracles and salvation on a personal and national scale. Beyond this, faith in God even helps to defend a wicked person and to bring about his salvation. In tractate Yoma (39a), our sages state: "You shall sanctify yourselves as holy and become holy" - "This means that a person makes himself a little holy but is consequently made greatly holy." This gemara and these explanations amplify a positive exegetical approach. As a rule, the Torah generally cannot or does not want to tell people how they ought to behave in every situation. The Torah lights the path and provides tools to guide man through his life. "You shall be holy because I the Lord, your God, am holy" is essentially the conscience that the Torah supplies to man.

The Torah recognizes that man is not able to fulfill the entirety of his religious life in an ideal manner. The Torah was not given to the ministering angels. Man is obviously commanded to try for the ideal, but the Torah recognizes the difficulties. Specifically



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for this reason we have the command “to be holy.” The Torah clarifies that we need to trust in God because it is only with His help that we are able to attain holiness. People need to make a true effort in the performance of the commandments and only then can we attain holiness. “You should be holy” and remember that this is because “I [God] am holy.” With My merits (God says) and with the merits of your faith in Me, you can reach the highest level possible.

This directive is not exclusive to our parsha, as it appears in other readings in a slightly different form. For example, in *Shemini* (Lev. 11:44) it states: “And you should sanctify yourselves as holy and become holy because I am the Lord, your God.” Also there we can say that God will assist you, if you on your own have not reached that level. The Torah recognizes the deep challenge and therefore directs a person on the appropriate path through faith and trust in God to attain holiness.

Sometimes the effort on our end is decisive in critical moments. At the time of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, our effort and faith was what brought God to perform a positive miracle. We are obligated to fulfill the commandments with sincerity and pure faith and, God willing, that will help us secure God’s everlasting love. May it be God’s will that during this time of the counting of the Omer whose entire purpose is to purify and sanctify us, that we should merit to attain great clarity in matters of trust in God, who seeks this ideal from us.

May we merit that God will shine kindness and love upon us with blessings of happiness, life, and peace. Amen for all eternity. Selah.