

PARASHAH: K'doshim (Holy People)
ADDRESS: Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:1-20:27
READING DATE: Shabbat
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*Updated: May 1, 2006

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Our Torah portion this week is called **K'doshim**. Our parashah begins with this benevolent statement from the Holy One:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר

דַּבֵּר אֶל-כָּל-עֵדַת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ
אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תְּהִיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

"Vay'dabeyr YHVH el-Moshe leymore: Dabeyr el-kal-adat B'ney-Yisra'el v'amarta ahleyhem: K'doshim tihyu ki kadosh ani YHVH Eloheychem."

ADONAI said to Moshe, "Speak to the entire community of Isra'el; tell them, 'You people are to be holy because I, ADONAI your God, am holy. (Lev. 19:1, 2)

From the opening two p'sukim a sh'eilah (Torah question) is put forth: How can we—the people of an absolute Holy God—likewise attain to holiness? The following lengthy quote from the *'Everyman's Talmud'* by Abraham Cohen, concerning holiness, will help us to begin to provide an answer:

'To the Rabbis the idea of God was not a metaphysical abstraction but the very foundation of right human living. As already mentioned, idolatry was

synonymous with immorality and a degraded standard of life. Conversely, belief in God was the inspiration of a lofty plane of thought and action. It will be shown later that the doctrine of *imitatio Dei*, the Imitation of God, lies at the root of Talmudic ethics.

'The characteristic term, which distinguishes the Deity from this point of view, is 'holiness.' It implies apartness from everything that defiles as well as actual perfection. The Rabbinic Jew always thought of God as 'the Holy One, blessed be He,' that being the commonest of all the names ascribed to Him.

'Both the divine holiness and its meaning for human beings are emphasized in this passage: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, says to man, "Behold, I am pure, My abode is pure, My ministers are pure, and the soul I give you is pure. If you return it to Me in the same state of purity that I give it to you, well and good; if not, I will destroy it before you"' (Leviticus Rabbah XVIII. 1).

'But the term 'holiness' has a special connotation when applied to God. It has a perfection, which is beyond the attainment of any human being. In the text, 'For he is a holy God' (Josh. XXIV. 19), the adjective has a plural form, which is explained to mean, 'He is holy with all kinds of holiness,' i.e., He is the perfection of holiness. On the words 'Ye shall be holy' (Leviticus XIX. 2) the comment is made: 'It is possible to imagine that man can be as holy as God; therefore the Scripture adds, "for I am holy"—My holiness is higher than any degree of holiness you can reach' (Leviticus Rabbah XXIV. 9).'¹

As has already been stated, holiness is not metaphysical; our concept of holiness does not define what is holy. Only the Holy One himself can fully define—as well as embody holiness. To be sure, the phrase '**I am ADONAI**,' or its equivalent '**I am ADONAI your God**' appears sixteen times in chapter nineteen alone! Chapter twenty sees another four uses of these phrases. The lesson is obvious:

ADONAI alone defines holiness among men; only he has the power and authority to set the standard of holiness—for he alone is the fullness of holiness—for he alone is ADONAI!

So what happens when humanity meets holiness?

HaShem is intimately interested in our redemption. Likewise, he is our deliverer from the unholy. That is why he masterfully planned for one man to become the

¹ Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (Shoken Books, 1975), p. 22, 23.

perfect embodiment and display of his holiness. Only this man would be able to showcase the fullness of the holiness of God to such a degree that to look at this man was to look at God! Only this man would be able to perfectly imitate God—for only this man was and is perfectly God.

Yeshua is his name!

And, he sets the standard!

Because of our new life in Messiah, we have inherited the holiness that HaShem intended for us to possess all along. When we place our trusting faithfulness in the perfect Man of God, our holiness (or lack thereof) becomes the holiness of the Father! Our constitution changes and we are no longer deemed 'unholy', for his riches in glory—which includes his holy standard of being—are transferred to our account! We must grasp this central truth and begin to live according to it!

We are holy because Yeshua has made us holy!

Just as unrighteous Avraham became righteous when he placed his complete faith in HaShem, so we too inherit the righteousness and holiness of the Holy One when we place our unreserved trust in his Son. But holiness is also a duty. What do I mean?

Walking in K'dushah

Apart from being an attribute of God—one that we inherit intrinsically with our trusting faithfulness in the Messiah, holiness is also meant to be a lifestyle. This is why I keep using the phrase 'trusting faithfulness' rather than simple 'faith'. The latter implies a one-time action on our part, which forever sets into motion a spiritual truth that will be fully actualized at the return of our LORD. Notice the candor of the phrase, "*I place my trust in Yeshua.*" However, the former carries the aspect of a daily motion, which permeates every movement of our new-creation lives! "*I place my trusting faithfulness in Yeshua.*" Do you notice the subtle difference? To live by 'trusting faithfulness' rather than just by 'faith' alone characterizes our moment-by-moment thought process as well as our actions. The former carries our faith *into* action! In other words, this new life in Messiah is an ever constant, ever-growing relationship with the Holy One of Isra'el; a demonstration of the miraculous on a level that can and should be measured in even the smallest areas of our lives. Trusting faithfulness is ongoing! It is not some unmoving, monumental event which took place sometime in our lives—it is the ongoing monumental process that overtakes our lives—for the rest of our lives—which was enacted when we first had a genuine encounter with the divine holiness!

Holiness is not something that we should just "put on and off" when it is convenient to us. It is a state that we should constantly exist in! How do we do

what HaShem expects us to do? By faithfully trusting in his Power and in his Word to work in and through our lives to produce a temple that is useable and dedicated. We do what the Torah tells us to do, and allow HaShem to make good on his promises that as we are doing what the Torah tells us to do, he is reshaping our thoughts and desires to conform to the image of his Holy Son. Holiness is not just something that we sit around and "dream" about; it is more than a "revelation" or a feeling! It is a call to action!

What I have been discussing here is not some new and modern twist on religion. It is the standard that HaShem has expected since the creation of man. We in the twenty-first century are geared towards wanting the latest and the greatest, but sometimes the "old wine is better." This year as Chanukkah takes place, take a moment to reflect on the reality of "who you are in Messiah." You don't need to be some hyper-spiritual person to accomplish the task of holiness! You are a dedicated, holy temple, set apart from the ordinary (the world and its system), and set apart unto a life of praise and obedience to God Almighty! This is an identity of preeminence! This is a position of honor! And the greatest reality is that this was accomplished, not because you or I deserved to be called "holy." Rather, it was because the Father chose to demonstrate his intense love for us by sending his Son to become the means of attaining holiness in the first place! Our holiness finds its purpose and meaning in the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of our LORD Yeshua! His Ruach (Spirit) empowers us to live a life that is pleasing to HaShem, and at the same time, gives us the boldness and opportunity to share our testimony with those who do not yet know Yeshua personally.

Holiness can be defined as 'separation from the ways of the world system unto God and his ways.' The true talmid (disciple) of Yeshua is called to a righteous life according to Scripture's standard. Let's examine some of the biblical marks of holiness. Daniel C. Juster has supplied the following list of holiness qualities in his excellent discipling manual *Growing to Maturity, A Messianic Jewish Guide*, published by the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC). The comments following each heading have been added by myself. I have labeled each for ease of understanding.

Dan Juster: 1. **A holy person is one who has died to self.**

Ariel: The person who struggles with complete surrender to our LORD cannot rightfully address him as LORD. For the person who recognizes him as such cannot at the same time claim to have personal control over his own life as well. When we surrender to God, we are transferring the seat of authority from our will to the Will of the Father. Yeshua must be LORD of all in order for him to be LORD of Ariel. In this aspect, holiness is a lifelong process. Am I saying that I am totally surrendered in my flesh? Oh, that I wish it were so! As Sha'ul stated, so state I: **'For in my inner self I completely agree with God's Torah; but in my various parts, I see a different "Torah"....(Romans 7:22-23)**' This aspect

of holiness is one that entails my constant surrendering to the LORD of lords, so that my death in Messiah might indeed be complete, and my life in him full to overflowing.

Dan Juster: 2. **A holy person is a person of compassionate love (agape).**

Ariel: Love is the supreme motivator of holy actions, and as such, should be the chief characteristic our new-creation lives in Messiah!

Dan Juster: 3. **A holy person reflects God's standards of righteousness in the Bible.**

Ariel: This is an issue of authority. We cannot dictate the standard of holiness, nor should we attempt to. Only God's holy Word has the authority to perform this vital function in our lives. When we succeed in demonstrating the holiness of HaShem as outlined for us in his Word, the surrounding communities will see and understand that there is no god like our God, and that his righteous standards are good, true, and reliable. Moreover, they will consequently desire to walk in this holiness as they see us walk in this holiness. Failure to make a difference between the holy and the profane always results in ungodliness and moral degradation and ultimately leads to death and destruction.

Dan Juster: 4. **A holy person does not lust for material possessions.**

Ariel: The Torah states 'The LORD is my Shepherd I shall not want.' The absence of holiness leaves room for covetous desire. HaShem has promised to supply all our needs, according to his riches, in Messiah. Lust for the treasures of this world is counterproductive to our trust in Messiah. Something, which truncates our trust, will also effect our standard of living, thus hindering our holiness. In the believer's life, there simply is no room for material lust.

Dan Juster: 5. **A holy person is called to holy or pure thinking.**

Ariel: This is where the battlefield of the mind exists! Our thought processes govern our outward actions. We usually think and then we act. Some of us fail to ever think before we act, but that is another lesson. The Torah enjoins us to take on the mind of Messiah that we may indeed perform the Will of God and therefore do his good pleasure. The Torah also admonishes us to think on godly things (read Philippians 4:8).

Dan Juster: 6. **The holy person is called to purity of speech.**

Ariel: It is said that the tongue can kill. Indeed, slander and gossip can so ruin a person's life that they are all but physically destroyed. The rabbis characterized such unholy speech by the title 'lashon harah', which means 'the evil tongue.' Lashon harah has the effect of a leprous sore which slowly but surely cripples the

individual until the whole body is infectious and weak. Unholy speech tears down individuals. The rabbis even go so far as to say that three individuals are destroyed by lashon harah: the person being talked about, the individual listening to the gossip, and the one delivering the gossip! The student should read Ephesians 4:29-30; James 3:6-18.

Dan Juster: 7. **The holy person is called to humility.**

Ariel: Genuine holiness cannot be maintained apart from humility. The proud person may externally follow some of the rules of holiness but will project a self-righteous, holier-than-thou attitude. Holiness without humility is pretense. This is a primary trap of many otherwise godly leaders. Without holiness and humility you cannot help others conquer sin and grow into maturity. Our ultimate example here of course is our humble LORD Yeshua.

Conclusions and Practical Applications

Dan Juster: 8. **The holy person is a socially compassionate person.**

Ariel: Our Torah portion includes this familiar, all-important mitzvah:

לֹא-תִקֹּם וְלֹא-תִטַּח אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶחָבֶיךָ
לְרֵעֶךָ כַּמִּזְוָה אֲנִי יְהוָה

“Lo-tikom v’lo-timor eht-B’ney amecha, v’ahavta l’reyacha kamoachah. Ani ADONAI.”

Don’t take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI. Leviticus 19:18

Our sages had much to say about this verse. Rabbi Akiva said that this is the fundamental rule of the Torah (Rashi; Sifra). Hillel paraphrased: “What is hateful to you, do not do to others” (Shabbos 31a). The story has been told how Hillel answered the request of the heathen who wished to be converted to Judaism on the condition that he was taught the whole Torah while he stood on one foot. The Rabbi answered him, ‘What is hateful to yourself, do not to your fellow man’ (ibid.). This is the Talmudic formulation of the Golden Rule. Great stress has been laid by theologians of a certain school upon the fact that Hillel’s maxim is worded in the negative, whereas the Gospels have it in the positive form. Profound ethical differences are detected by them in the variation; but they who have no theological axe to grind will probably agree with the conclusion of Professor Kittel: ‘In reality almost everything which has been thought to exist in delicate difference between the negative and positive form is due to modern reflections on the subject. For the consciousness of the age of Jesus the two forms were scarcely distinguishable.’

The sages continue, ‘We must wish upon others the same degree of success and prosperity we wish upon ourselves and we must treat others with the utmost respect and consideration (Ramban)’. When questioned directly about which mitzvot are the greatest in Torah, Yeshua replied that the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4) and this one here in Leviticus 18 are! In fact, our Master went on to explain that a proper understanding of his Father’s Torah stems from an understanding of these two mitzvot!

Which brings us back around full-circle! Loving God is based on a correct knowledge of him, and this in turn produces holiness—of which he commands us to possess!

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

“ADONAI our God, ADONAI is one!”

This mitzvah is the primary form of profound revelation knowledge.

וְאַהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

“And you are to love ADONAI your God,”

This mitzvah is the fruit of genuine revelation knowledge of the unity [echad] of HaShem.

קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

“You people are to be holy because I, ADONAI your God, am holy.”

The injunction is set into motion once we have internalized the first two mitzvot.

וְאַהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Our holiness finds purpose as we imitate God by demonstrating his love in us towards our fellow man.

The closing blessing is as follows:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v’chay-yeh o’lam nata-b’tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you O’ LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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