

PARSHAS KEDOSHIM

תשפ"ב

Rashi at the beginning of Parshas Kedoshim explains that this parsha has many basic elements of the Torah in it. But it all begins with the mitzvah to be kodosh. What does it mean to be kodosh? Rashi explains that kedushoh means separating from arayos. The Rambam's sefer Kedushoh in Mishna Torah has two subjects, forbidden foods and arayos.

Kedoshim Ti'hiyu is a demand to live up to what it means to be Jewish. The Rambam, when he is describing the essence of geirus, says becoming Jewish is to enter a bris whose goal is to make a relationship with Hashem. The binding elements of that bris that made us Jewish at Har Sinai are the essence of geirus today – teviloh, miloh and korbon. But the goal was the connection with Hashem. It wasn't just an obligation made by our ancestors. We ourselves – in every generation – are included in this bris. The posuk in Yisro says that the consequence of the bris with Hashem is that He will make us His special nation. We will be exclusively selected to be Hashem's representatives through doing Hashem's avodoh. Out of the entire human race, we will have the status of royalty. Why? Because we are a mamleches kohanim v'goy kodosh. It means our goals in our life are spiritual goals.

The story of Yonah is very instructive in defining what a Jew essentially is. There was a massive sea-storm and the sailors realized it was because of Yonah. So they asked him who he was – what does he do, where does he come from? Many people define themselves by their occupation. Others define themselves by their nationality or ethnic background. Yonah by profession was a fisherman from Eretz Yisroel. But he didn't tell them that. He responded by saying my self-definition is that I am an Ivri who fears the One who created Heaven and Earth, the land and the sea. He said he is an Ivri to emphasize that he isn't like everyone else. We are a separate nation with different goals and values than the rest of the world.

We made a bris with Hashem which created all sorts of obligations and mitzvos. But the ultimate goal, as the Rambam says, is to establish that special connection with Hashem. We are royalty as representatives of Hashem because we are a nation of kedoshim.

Hashem created two-plus worlds. He created a spiritual world and a physical world, and a human being who could and can bridge both worlds. But we decide which world is primary to our lives and which one is secondary. We can define our essence as a physical being who happens to have a more advanced and more sophisticated intellect than all other animals. Or we can define ourselves primarily as a neshomo who is using the physical body in the physical world for spiritual goals. A Jew doesn't let his physical being take control over his life. This is why kedushoh means to be distant from arayos and not let this powerful physical drive control us.

The Raavad in Baalei Hanefesh quotes the Yerushalmi which says the following idea. On the Yom haDin, we will be asked if we used every aspect of the physical world to serve Hashem. The Ramban says the reason we have physical mitzvos to perform with our bodies is to bring spirituality all the way down into every aspect of our physical lives.

The Ohr Hachayim says the reason why this parsha had to be told to the entire Jewish people is to emphasize that kedushoh is not just for the tzadikim. Living a life of kedushoh is possible and required for every single Jew, no matter his level.

Earlier in Acharei Mos, the Ohr HaChaim explains why before the parsha of arayos, the Torah emphasized that Klal Yisroel are coming from Egypt

and going to the land of Canaan. It is to remove any kind of excuse that a Jew might have for not keeping away from arayos. Someone might want to claim that once he is deeply exposed to this kind of indecent behavior, it is impossible not to resist the temptation. So the verses tell us the Torah is very much aware that one's environment has an impact on a person. And despite the fact that Klal Yisroel were in Egypt where these immoral acts were part of the culture, and despite the fact that Klal Yisroel will be coming to a land where these immoral behaviors will be a part of the culture, we are still being commanded to refrain from arayos. A Jew has the ability to be kodosh wherever he is and in the face of whatever he is exposed to.

The Ramban and the Rambam have a broader definition of this mitzvah than Rashi.

The Ramban points out that the Torah technically permits one to marry as many wives as he wants and feast on meat and wine all day and every day. His wives are permitted, the food can be kosher, he can speak nivul peh, and the Torah never explicitly says any of it is forbidden. But the result will be that the person will become a 'novol b'reshus haTorah'. Without this mitzvah of Kedoshim Ti'hiyu, the danger is that you will be consumed by physical pleasure and be totally preoccupied with it. A person has to decide who he really is at the core. Yes, you can enjoy the pleasures of the physical world, but you have to keep them in balance. The goal of the Torah is to uplift a person and put the neshomo in control the body and not have one's physical urges control him.

It is interesting that the Ramban included nivul peh in his list of behaviors that are technically permitted but is the opposite of kedushoh. Why? Because the way a person talks reflects who and what he is. If your mouth is in the gutter then your mind is in the gutter – and that means you are in the gutter.

So after all the mitzvos defining kosher food and what are permitted relations, you still need to make sure your permitted pleasures are balanced and kept in proportion. Unfortunately, many frum people today are forming the habit of collecting luxury cars and high class wines and expensive alcoholic beverages. And they take great pride in their collections in which they invest hundreds of thousands of dollars. They are telling the world that the most important part of their identity is the high class luxuries they can afford. But that isn't what a Jew is about. The most important part of a Jew's life is his connection to Hashem – Who is beyond our physical world. Our goal is to be His representatives. And the deepest connection you can make with Hashem is by limud haTorah.

So the Ramban says the mitzvah of kedushoh is to limit our consumption of wine and permitted relations. The stories in the Torah teach us that consequences of over-indulging in these pleasures are catastrophic.

There is a very important shitta of the Rambam found in Hilchos Avodo Zoro and Sefer Hamitzvos which says a person has to know how to limit his intellectual activity. We can't always trust our intellect to arrive at the truth. A baal taivoh can use his intellect to twist logic and justify absolutely anything. Additionally, it is forbidden to make indulgence in physical pleasure as a goal in life. Goals in life have to be spiritual goals. One can enjoy physical pleasure but it has to be used in the service of Hashem. Hashem gave us a body and neshomo – we use our body to serve the goals of the neshomo.

This is Kedoshim Ti'hiyu. After discussing forbidden foods and forbidden relations in technical terms, we are told a more general principle by the Torah – the defining aspect of what it means to be Jewish is to be kodosh. Our goal in life is to connect to Hashem in

the greatest way possible – and every Jew is capable of being kodosh. Review this Ramban over and over because it defines what it means to be a Jew.