

Kedoshim 22 “Our Holy Land”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat Shalom. First , I'd like to acknowledge that we are blessed to have 2 sponsors for this week's kiddush: Marjie & Ed Letzter are sponsoring in commemoration of the 2nd yahrtzeit of Ed's father, Fredrick Letzter (Ephraim ben Yitzhak) z'l. May his memory be a blessing.

Chana & Steven Strauss are sponsoring an ice cream kiddush in honor of all the friends who made their first year in Philly so special, and as a farewell to those leaving in the next few weeks. We will miss you!

I'd also like to acknowledge that Shaul Kushinsky, Rebecca Somach, and Abrielle Fuerst are sponsoring a hot Israeli style seudat shlishit this afternoon in honor of Yom Ha'atzmaut, the Jewish people, and the Mekor Community. Am Yisrael Chai!

Yom Ha'atzmaut is certainly worthy of great celebration. The continued existence of Israel is a miracle, as we weather a myriad of complicated challenges, year after year. But every year also seems to bring more news about Israeli accomplishments and its world-wide prominence. The Times of Israel, in an article about Yom Haatzmaut, listed 74 wonders – some might say miracles - of Israel on its 74th birthday, and it's an impressive list.

What makes Israel special of course is that it is *admat hakodesh, the Holy Land*, a phrase coined by Zecharia Hanavi. But what exactly is meant by its designation as *the holy land*?

I think an answer could come from our parsha's name, *kedoshim*, dubbed from the commandment of *kedoshim tehiyu, that we be holy*. Most people associate holiness with vague notions such as spirituality, which to me seems somewhat trite. I think it's incumbent upon us to look for a more profound meaning of the term *kedusha/holiness*.

To define a word in the Torah, the first commentator we usually consult is Rashi. Rashi translates the word *kedoshim* as *perushim*, meaning *distinct or separate*. He explains that to be holy, we should separate ourselves from transgression. To some, this explanation might suggest a form of asceticism, which (among other sources) the Ramchal teaches in Mesilat Yeshrim is not a practice the Torah condones. On the other hand, the Ramban offers the maxim that *kedoshim tehiyu* commands us to not become a *naval birshut Hatorah, a miscreant who has the permission of the Torah*. In other words, holiness demands that you pay attention not merely to the technical laws of the Torah, but to the **spirit** of the law as well.

This interpretation of the Ramban is, like Rashi's explanation, vague and requires clarification. It seems strange that the concept of *kedusha/holiness* envelops the Torah, yet we struggle to comprehend it.

Our parsha consists of a list of mandates that are supposed acts of holiness. For example, the list consists of random laws like: respect your parents, keep Shabbat, give charity, don't steal, don't give false testimony, don't use God's name in vain, don't curse a deaf person, don't put a stumbling block in front of a blind person, don't take revenge, don't breed or create clothing from two different species, don't listen to soothsayers, be honest in business, to name just a few of the mitzvot listed under the banner of *kedoshim tehiyu*. These commandments are all well and good, but how does this miscellaneous list give us a deeper understanding of holiness?

I think we find a hint to the answer when we consider that in *Parshat Kedoshim*, God repeatedly declares *Ani Hashem, I am hashem*, no less than 20 times, which is more than any other parsha in the Torah. Initially, that declaration is accompanied by the verse *Kedoshim tehiyu ki kadosh **ani hashem**, You should be holy because **I am hashem** [who is holy]*.

The key to understanding this initial verse can be found in the midrash, which teaches that our relationship with God is like a marriage, which the Torah calls *kiddushin*, sharing the same root word as *Kedoshim/holiness*. The midrash connects the idea of *marriage* and *holiness* with an analogy of a king who tells his newly crowned queen that she now must act with more dignity and grace than previously, because *now that you are married to the king, you automatically have become the queen!* So too, God tells the Jewish people that we are “married” to each other, and since I, God, am holy, *kedoshim tehiyu*, you, the Jewish people, as my queen, must be holy as well.

Therefore, God repeatedly declares that *ani hashem, I am hashem*, referring to God being *kadosh/holy*, the God who we did *kiddushin* with, the God who we are married to. *By* fulfilling the commandments in our parsha, we will be acting properly, with *kedusha/holiness*, fitting for the people who are married to the king.

We see that *kedusha* doesn't simply mean to be spiritual, or to be a good person. *Kedusha* requires us to be constantly aware of our special relationship with God, and live life with more awareness and sensitivity because of that relationship.

It is this fundamental connection to God, the essence of *holiness, kedusha*, which is expressed through *admat hakodesh*, the *Holy Land*, the land God promised to Avraham Avinu and his heirs. We must always remember that because of that promise, the land of Israel is every Jewish person's legacy at birth.

So, as we celebrate the 74th birthday of the State of Israel, whether we are religious or secular, whether we are in Israel or in *chutz laaretz*, *kedoshim tehiyu* asks us to care deeply about Israel, to be aware of the profound relationship continuously developing between God and the Jewish people, which is channeled through the land of Israel, and to thereby become inspired to live a life that is holy. Shabbat Shalom.