

5782 – Leviticus 19-20 – Kedoshim (Be holy)

¹⁹The LORD said to Moses, ²⁰Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: **'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'** ³⁰Each of you must respect your mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God. ⁴⁰Do not turn to idols or make metal gods for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.

1. *Sidrah Kedoshim* is situated in the middle of the Five Books of Moses. **Its solemn call to sanctify our lives represents the climax of Torah legislation.** The people of Israel were charged with the ideal of holiness from their very beginning as a sovereign nation (Exo 19:6) and all the preceding laws were but the necessary steps for reaching that ideal.¹

a. Exodus 19:6

⁶'you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

b. It is the mid-point of the Torah—therefore, it is the fulcrum on which the Torah balances, and highlights the deepest heart of the precious foundation of the Word of God.

After having established the preliminary conditions for holiness in the Divine service and in man's daily practices regarding his food, ritual purity, and sexual relationships, the Torah now proclaims the conditions for holiness in the domain of ethical and social justice. Contrary to the evaluation of outsiders, **the Jewish religion does not limit itself merely to a concern for moral and social principles.** These are emphasized, but only as the culmination of a large legislative structure whose foundations are made up of a whole series of ritual laws contained in the previous chapters.

c. Matthew 5:17-48

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them ... ¹⁹Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven ...

²¹"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment ... ²³Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something

against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift ...

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, (i.e., *in order to remarry*) makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.'³⁴But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all ... ³⁷All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'³⁹But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

d. Luke 5:14

¹⁴Then Yeshua ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, **show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing,** as a testimony to them."

¹ Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Vayikra*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 206-218.

e. Luke 22:14-16

¹⁴When the hour came, Yeshua and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵And he said to them, "**I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you** before I suffer. ¹⁶For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

Coming at the crowning summit of this structure, *Sidrah Kedoshim* appears as a beacon which sends rays of the holiness-ideal over the whole panorama of human existence. This ideal of holiness is not based on the norms of common sense or rational behavior. Instead, **it is a unique concept inherent in Creation**—a concept that was specifically assigned to the people of Israel as an end in itself. They are to be a holy nation because that is the will of God. The division between holy and non-holy was created by God, *הַמַּבְדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחַל*, *Who distinguishes between holy and ordinary*. It is He Who created the separation between light and darkness, between Israel and the other nations, between the seventh day and the six days of work. **The distinction is permanent and unchangeable**. Attempting to go beyond it would be like trying to change the roles of light and darkness.

In the non-Jewish world, the ideal of "returning to nature" is commonly seen as the noblest goal to which man can aspire. For Jews, the true ideal of holiness must go beyond nature. Nature is considered as being inherently *טְהוֹרָה*, *pure*, but still lacking in *קְדוּשָׁים*, *holiness* ...

The struggle of the Jewish religion with nature is clearly illustrated by the first *mitzvah* in a man's life, circumcision. Just as his life begins, the male Jew is committed to casting off nature and rising to meet the expectations of holiness. The dietary laws and the laws of ritual purity and *niddah* (separation) are all designed to control human nature. The rules concerning forbidden marriages show the same tendency. Marriage itself is a challenge to nature because natural reproduction does not need any ceremony and marriage is therefore given the name *קְדוּשִׁין*, *sanctification*, for it is a symbol of the holiness that man can achieve by overcoming nature.

2. בְּיַיְשׁוּרָאֵל—*The entire assembly of the Children of Israel*. Because most of the fundamental laws of the Torah are dependent on it, this section was proclaimed when the people were assembled (Rashi). **Whereas many other mitzvos apply to only a particular segment of the nation, such as Kohanim, Levites, the firstborn, the males, etc, the principle of holiness concerns all parts of the community and each person is called upon to work towards this ideal to the best of his means and abilities.**

The presence of the entire assembly moreover signifies that the ultimate goal of holiness can be achieved only through the collective efforts of the whole nation. Each individual, of course, can reach a degree of holiness, but that personal effort will remain of only relative importance since the majority of the basic laws of the Torah depend on the participation of the community. Examples are the congregational sacrificial offerings, the gatherings on the festivals, the duties of social welfare, and the *mitzvos* of *shemittah* (seventh year) and *yovel* (Jubilee). **The highest perfection cannot be achieved in isolation or in solitude; it requires communion with others. The glory of God can be revealed only in the presence of a multitude** (*Rashi*, Numbers 10:36).

a. 1Peter 1:13-16

¹³Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Yeshua the Messiah is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But **just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do**; ¹⁶for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev 19:2).

b. 1Thessalonians 4:7

For God did not call us to be impure, **but to live a holy life**.

c. 2Corinthians 7:1

Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

d. James 3:13

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their **good life**, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

e. Hebrews 12:14

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone **and to be holy**; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

f. 1John 3:3

All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

g. Matthew 18:20

²⁰For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

3. קְדוּשָׁים תִּהְיוּ—*Be holy*.

- a. The words *Kedoshim te'hiyu* ("You shall be holy") is **plural**—it is the *people of Israel* who shall be holy—The command to "be a holy people" is repeated three more times in this parasha (20:7, 8, 26).

1) Leviticus 20:7

⁷You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.

וְהָיָה קִדְשְׁכֶם וְהָיִיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

v'hit-ka-dish-tem vi-h'yi-tem k'doshim ki ani HaShem Eloheinu

a) To be 'holy' is to be set apart, consecrated, sanctified; **separated from the profane, dedicated to God's use. Man is not only to worship God but to imitate him.**

2) Leviticus 20:8

⁸And you shall keep My statutes **and practice them**; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

a) We should actively pursue “holiness” and be separate from things common (or unclean).

b) This parshah follows a detailed description of relationships that are pleasing, and *not* pleasing to the Lord.

3) Leviticus 20:22-26

²²“Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.

²³You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. ²⁴But I said to you, “You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey.” I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations. ²⁵“You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground—those that I have set apart as unclean for you. ²⁶**You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy**, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

b. 1Peter 1:15-16

¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so **be holy in all you do**;

¹⁶for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

Rashi defines holiness as the duty of keeping away from illicit sexual relationships and other sins ...

This interpretation is opposed by Ramban and by Rabbeinu Bachya (in *Kad Hakemach* [“the Flour-jar”]²). In their view, **holiness refers to**

self-restraint in the vast range of acts which are not forbidden. This is in accordance with the Talmudic principle: *sanctify yourself in what is permitted to you* (Yevamot [Brother's widow] 20a). Thus, although the law prohibits sexual union with a close relative and the eating of certain foods, it does permit intimate relations with a non-relative, eating meat, and drinking wine. A person could fall into sensuality and voluptuousness, while remaining fully within his legal right; he could become one of the drinkers of wine and boisterous eaters of meat (Proverbs 23:20). He could resort to obscenities and rude language without trespassing the technicalities of the law. He would thus become a despicable person, all the while remaining within the legality of the Torah.

c. 1Corinthians 6:12 (CJB)

¹²You say, “For me, everything is permitted”? Maybe, but not everything is helpful. **“For me, everything is permitted”? Maybe, but as far as I am concerned, I am not going to let anything gain control over me.**

1) Obviously, not “everything is permitted” (could Paul murder someone or commit adultery, etc.? No!) Paul is talking about the exact same thing as Rabbi Munk is this commentary. Paul is saying that even though all permitted things are permitted, he does not engage in behavior and/or activity that is not good for him.

That is why, after listing the formally forbidden actions in the previous chapters, **the Torah here proclaims the general principle of reserve which must be maintained even while performing permissible acts. Holiness implies temperance, that is, moderation of one's desires and passions.** It includes sobriety in the satisfaction of appetites, avoidance of spiritual contamination, and moderation in language. (See *Succah* 28a and *Akeidat Yitzchak* 67.) Seen in this light, **the command to be holy is not one of the 613 mitzvot**, as *Hilchot Gedolot* (“the great laws”) holds, but **a general commandment, meant to imbue all the formal laws with the quality necessary to ensure ethical behavior** (Sefer HaMitzvot 4).

d. Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴Hearing that Yeshua had silenced the Sadducees, (some of) the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, (proved) him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷Yeshua replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ³⁸This

² *Kad Hakemach* consists of sixty chapters, alphabetically arranged, containing discourses and dissertations on the requirements of religion and morality, as well as Jewish ritual practices.

is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**"

e. Luke 10:25-28

²⁵On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Yeshua. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷He answered, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'**" ²⁸"You have answered correctly," Yeshua replied. **"Do this and you will live."**

For R' Moshe Chaim Luzzatto,³ however, the *abstinence*, which according to Ramban constitutes the very basis of *holiness*, represents only the road leading to *piety*, which is inferior to holiness. In the thirteenth chapter of *Mesillat Yesharim*⁴, he discusses the limits of this preliminary step. It should not be extended to the extreme of asceticism, mortifications, and the refusal of earthly necessities. Whatever the circumstances, **the austerity of one's daily actions should never hinder the duty of sociability included in the mitzvah of living a holy life.**

As presented in *Mesillat Yesharim* (26), the ultimate holiness for man consists of living in a state of communion with God to such a point that whatever the person is doing, he never separates or removes himself from Hashem. **Therefore holiness is not exclusive but inclusive.** The man whose efforts are sanctified by God reaches a level at which his material actions themselves take on the value of true holiness ... If, after having submitted to the full discipline of the preliminary *mitzvot*, a person applies himself unstintingly (i.e., not restricting or holding back), in love and in fear, to grasp the grandeur of God, he will gradually succeed in **detaching himself from material concerns** and will be able to concentrate his attention on true communion with God. *Then the Spirit from above will hover over him, the Creator will cause His Name to rest upon him, and he will become like an angel of Hashem*; all his actions, even the humblest and most material, will then have the value of sacrifices and service to God. That is the definition of *attachment*, which leads to holiness. Similar views are expressed by R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi (*Tanya*⁵ 86), R' Chaim ben Attar and others.)

f. Matthew 5:13-16

¹³"**You are the salt of the earth.** But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴"**You are the light of the world.** A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, **let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**

1) John 15:8

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

2) 1Peter 2:12

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

3) Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's handiwork, created in Messiah Yeshua to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

4) Ephesians 5:8

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.

g. Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵"Therefore I tell you, **do not worry about your life**, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we

3 Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746), also known by the Hebrew acronym RaM-CHaL was a prominent Italian rabbi, kabbalist, and philosopher.

4 *Mesillat Yesharim* is an ethical (musar) text composed by the influential Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746).

5 The *Tanya* is an early work of Hasidic philosophy, by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Hasidism, first published in 1796. Its formal title is

Likkutei Amarim ("collection of statements"), but is more commonly known by its opening word, *Tanya*, which means "it was taught in a beraita" ("outside" - an oral tradition not incorporated into the Mishnah). It is composed of five sections that define Hasidic mystical psychology and theology as a handbook for daily spiritual life in Jewish observance.

eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But **seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

1) Psalm 55:22

Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.

2) Phillipians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

3) Hebrews 13:5

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."