



57

### TURNING HOLINESS UPSIDE DOWN

**I**S 'HOLINESS' A THEME WORD TODAY? POSSIBLY NOT. THE GENERAL QUEST is for this worldly experience and satisfaction, and 'holiness' sounds as if, in some sense, it is taking a person out of the world. In fact this is how Jewish teaching explains the concept of the holy. In a famous passage in the prayer-book, the Angels say "Holy, holy, holy" referring to G-d. This is explained as meaning that however spiritual the Angels may be, G-d is infinitely beyond and exalted, higher and higher....

Now, of course, in Jewish teaching G-d is not only beyond the world. G-d is also *within* the world<sup>2</sup>. The term Holy, however, seems to imply a step away from daily life. Is that the final word on the subject? Let us see.

The Sedra<sup>3</sup> this week is called *Kedoshim*, which means holy. It begins with the words: "You shall be holy, because I, G-d, am holy"<sup>4</sup>.

The Sages discuss the practical implications of this statement. Rashi says it means the self restraint necessary in order to keep the rules of the Torah concerning boundaries in human relations. Ramban (Nachmanides) says it means self-restraint in general, even concerning permitted things. He quotes the Sages who tell us "Sanctify yourself in that which is permitted"<sup>5</sup>, meaning "restrain yourself". Just because

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the food is permitted, it does not mean that one has to be a glutton.

Why? Why all this self-restraint? Why not just enjoy oneself, especially if it is *permitted*? What is the problem?

One way of explaining this is that the aim of the Torah and its teachings is not to make a person leave the world, ascending towards holiness and all that is beyond, but the reverse: to reveal holiness and G-dliness *in* this physical world. Hence the many laws of the Torah which almost all concern some aspect of our physical lives. By keeping those laws we are drawing the Divine and the sacred into our physical domain, into our kitchen, office and bedroom.

However, so long that we are only keeping the minimalist aspect of the law, just that which has been specifically commanded, it is as if we are keeping the law simply because we are forced to do so. G-d instructs us to do something, or to refrain from something, so, with a sigh, we obey.

The idea of doing a little bit ‘extra’ is in order to show that we actually *identify* with the quest to make our lives and our world a dwelling for G-d. So we continue along this path, not only through the Mitzvot, the sacred commandments, but also in the ordinary affairs of daily life. There too we seek to express holiness.

In this way we reveal an important possibility in life: that not only the domain of the Mitzvot, but every detail of existence is potentially holy. Nothing is ‘ordinary’. The entire world is, or can become, a dwelling for G-d<sup>6</sup>.

Hence there are a number of areas of life in which we are encouraged to take an extra step, beyond the letter of the law. For example, in fulfilment of the Mitzva “love your neighbour as yourself”<sup>7</sup>, which is also in our Sedra. Through this, so to speak, we bring holiness down to earth, reaching towards the time when “the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea”<sup>8</sup>.

1. Quoting Isaiah 6:3. 2. That prayer continues with another verse, Ezekiel 3:12, “Blessed be the Glory of G-d from His Place”, which is explained as meaning that G-d’s Glory is drawn *into* the world. 3. Leviticus chs.19-20. 4. Lev.19:2. See also 20:7. 5. See Talmud, Yevamot 20a. 6. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 1, p.256 ff. 7. Lev.19:18. 8. Isaiah 11:9.

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53

*SEDRA KEDOSHIM*

**AHAVAT YISRAEL - LOVE OF ONE'S FELLOW**

"Isn't that girl in your class?" the twins' mother asked her daughters. "Why don't you go and say hello to her while I pay?"

They were in Sainsbury's, shopping, when who should they meet but Galit Rose. Debbi and Leah looked at each other.

"Well, she is in our class, but we're not really friends with her. Nobody likes her. And she's always really rude to everyone," Debbi explained.

"Oh wow, what a wonderful chance you two have to do a really big Mitzva, and you're just missing out on it. What a shame!" their mother said.

"What Mitzva? Leah asked.

"The Mitzva of Love your Fellow as Yourself. It's actually one of the commandments given in this week's Sedra".

"Oh Mummy!" Debbi groaned. "It can't apply to people like Galit. She's just impossible to like. Believe me, Leah and I have tried to be friends, but she won't even *let* you be nice to her."

"That's just the point. It's not very difficult to like *nice* people. The challenge of this Mitzva is to apply it even to difficult people. The commandment doesn't exclude anyone - obviously we have to love everybody, whatever their personality."

The twins' mother looked at her daughters' faces. She could see that it was not going to be so easy!

"Someone like Galit is a big challenge", she continued. "But that's what life is all about – facing challenges! And I think once she'd see that you really want to be friends with her, she'd open up."

The girls looked at each other again. "Well, maybe we could try," Leah admitted. "It can't really hurt, ! suppose..."

A few days later the family was at supper. "Mummy," asked Debbi, "could someone come and do homework with us after school tomorrow and stay for supper?"

"That shouldn't be a problem. Who's coming?"

"Can you guess?"

"Could it be Galit?"

"Yes, you were right, Mummy. She's become really friendly - and not just to us, to others as well. And she's really funny and knows how to draw hilarious pictures of people. Thank you for your advice."

The twins' mother smiled, gently.

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