

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim – Shabbat 02 May 2015

The opening exhortation of the second Sedra in our double Sedra of Acharei/ Kedoshim this week, begin with these words:

“And G-d said to Moshe saying;
Speak to all the congregation of the Children of Israel and say to them.
You shall be holy For I, the Lord Your G-d am Holy.”

A major point of discussion amongst our commentators is what do these words mean when we are instructed by G-d to be holy?

Rashi notes that this command is placed next to the end of Acharei, which speaks about the forbidden relationships in the Torah. He also explains that the term Kadosh means to separate. Therefore the Torah is saying that the command to be holy means to separate oneself from any possibility of sexual misconduct.

Rambam in his Guide to Perplexed has a different slant on this. He says that the emphasis here is the command: You shall be Holy- **Ki kaddosh ani**-because I, the Lord Your G-d am Holy.

Here he learns that the command to be Holy is to emulate G-d. Well you cannot actually be physically like G-d because He is infinite, unlimited. Instead emulate His middot- His attributes. Just as G-d is merciful we should also be merciful. Just as G-d looks after the poor; the widow and the orphan; so too when we are instructed to be holy, we should emulate the holiness of G-d and imitate His Middot

Ramban- Nachmanides- disagrees with Rashi’s interpretation that the Kaddosh here is just referring to separation from sexual misconduct. He takes it much further and suggests that the command; You shall be holy is a general overarching instruction to separate ourselves even from those things that are permitted by the Torah.

He explains for example that the Torah tells us to keep kosher. But it doesn’t tell us to go easy with **how much** we eat and drink. So accordingly one could become a glutton bireshut HaTorah- with the Torahs permission to act inappropriately.

So the Ramban says this law of You shall be Holy is that a Jew has to restrict his or herself even from those things that are permitted. Once again, the word kaddosh means to separate – to ensure that we act as

Jews in a separate manner- befitting the Holy nation, as we were instructed to strive to be prior to being given the Torah.

The common denominator of these explanations is that G-d wants me to aspire to be something greater, to lift ourselves up from the mundane and to strive for kedusha .

Now I come to my own interpretation of what I think the Torah means when it says Kedoshim tiheyu- You shall be holy, because I, the Lord Your G-d am Holy.

I don't now whether any of the commentators give this reason- but just look at a few examples of some of the commandments about which the Torah speaks in Sedra Kedoshim.

We are instructed;

A man has to revere his mother and his father

Do not place a stumbling block before the blind. – do not mislead people

Do not hate your brother in your heart

Do not take revenge- Do not bear a grudge

Love your neighbour as yourself

These are just some of the many mitzvot in the Torah this morning

If the Torah was just a random book of man made laws, why would it be telling us about these mitzvot which are unenforceable?

You don't know whether or not I love my neighbour as myself, because it deals with my thoughts. You also do not know whether I bear a grudge against anybody or whether or not I want to take revenge.

And if I hated somebody in my heart you also wouldn't know it, or if I had misled anybody you might not find out

All these precepts and many more in our Sedra are between myself and my fellow man, but ultimately, unless I went around revealing my innermost thoughts to everybody, only G-d would really know whether I kept up these laws or not.

Even the last one of the Ten Commandments: Thou shalt not covet. Who is to know whether or not I am jealous of another person, unless I revealed that covetedness to another person it remains a secret. There is no way that any human laws could legislate on our thoughts, only on our actions. To me, this is one of the greatest proofs of the Divinity of our Torah.

Ultimately it is Hashem who sees and knows what is going on in the depths of our hearts. That's why these laws are in the Torah.

He knows whether I love my fellow humans. He knows whether I revere my parents. He knows whether I bear a grudge. He knows whether I have misled another human being. He knows.

And that's the reason why we are instructed at the very outset of the Sedra: You shall be holy, for I, the Lord Your G-d am holy.

Ultimately, Hashem wants me to aspire to become a better person.

The words of Ben Bag Bag resonate in our hearts and souls

“Study the Torah over and over again because everything is in it”.

Shabbat shalom