

Parashat Shemini 5781, 2021:

Rabbi David Etengoff

*In Pursuit of the Holy*

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The essence of Hashem's purpose in gifting the Torah to the Jewish people is imparted immediately prior to the Revelation at Mount Sinai: "And now, if you obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of princes and a holy nation (*goy kadosh*) ..." (*Sefer Shemot* 19:5-6, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The obligation to attain this sanctified status is writ large in two *pasukim* in our *parasha*:

For I am the L-rd your G-d, and you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, because I am holy, and you shall not defile yourselves through any creeping creature that crawls on the ground. For I am the L-rd Who has brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your G-d. Thus, you shall be holy, because I am holy. (*Sefer Vayikra* 11:44-45)

In these verses, *ki kadosh Ani* (because I am holy) emerges as the basis of Hashem's command to us to pursue *kedushah* (holiness). The expression, "Thus, you shall be holy, *ki kadosh Ani*," however, does not seem to fit a standard "if x then y" kind of model. This is especially the case, since the Master of the Universe is omnipotent, infinite and eternal, and we are finite and "like a passing shadow." (Rosh Hashanah liturgy) What, then, does Hashem's *kedushah* have to do with our *kedushah*?

Rabbeinu Shimshon Raphael Hirsch *zatzal* (1808-1888) helps us formulate an answer to our question:

*Ki kadosh Ani Hashem Elokeichem*: the source of the possibility that you *can* be holy and the reason why you *should* be holy, lies in the fact that *kadosh Ani Hashem Elokeichem*, that I, Who am *Hashem Elokeichem*, am *kadosh*. The *kedushah*, the holiness to which you are to strive with all the force of your moral free will is, in its true absolute purity, an attribute of Me Myself, and as Hashem have I given you with My Breath, participation in this freedom, and continue giving you constantly strength and assistance for everything which is good. In *kadosh Ani Hashem* lies the source of your ability for *kedushah*. (*Commentary on the Torah, Sefer Vayikra 19:2*, translation, Rabbi Isaac Levy, second edition, page 499)

Rav Hirsch's interpretation of how and why we can and should be *kadosh* is an exegetical tour de force. In his view, the potential to attain *kedushah* is an attribute of the Almighty that He bestows upon us at the moment of our creation. As such, *ki kadosh Ani*, and all that it entails, is the source of our ability to pursue *kedushah* and actualize it in our lives.

Rav Hirsch's analysis is congruent with a statement of the *Midrash Sifra* on the above-cited *pasukim* in our *parasha*: "Just like I am holy, so, too, should you be holy. Just like I am separate [from all that is antithetical to *kedushah*], so, too, should you be separate." (Translation and brackets my own) The pursuit of *kedushah*, therefore, is inextricably linked to the *mitzvah* of *v'halachta b'drachov* (walking in Hashem's ways). This idea is also given powerful voice by Rabbi Ovadia Seforno (1475-1550) in his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verses:

I [Hashem] desire that you will sanctify and prepare yourselves for *kedushah*. It is fitting that you will be holy and ever successful in your recognition of your Creator and emulate His actions, for this is what I desire — that you should model yourselves after Me. (Translation my own)

With Hashem's help and our heartfelt desire, may we ever endeavor to emulate Him in our pursuit of *kedushah*. May this enable us to live lives that bring honor to the Jewish people, and glory to His holy name. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic from *klal Yisrael* and all the nations of the world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha's* name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.