

Parshiot Acharei Mot - Kedoshim 5778, 2018:

The Community and Holiness

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, and HaRav Raphael ben HaRav Ephraim, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha, Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah and Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parashat Kedoshim's verse: "And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the entire congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, "You shall be holy (*kedoshim*), for I, the L-rd, your G-d, am holy,"' is celebrated for its powerful call to the Jewish people to live lives invested with holiness. (*Sefer Vayikra* 19:1-2, this and all Rashi and *Tanach* translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Rashi, basing himself upon a variety of midrashic sources, explains the phrases, "entire congregation of Israel" and "you shall be holy," in the following fashion:

Entire Congregation of Israel: [This] teaches us that this passage was stated in the assembly [of the entire congregation of Israel] because most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah are dependent on it [i.e., they are encapsulated in this passage].

You shall be holy: Separate yourselves from illicit relations and from sin, for wherever one finds a barrier against illicit relations, one finds holiness...

The great mid-18th century Chasidic master, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Halevi Epstein, known to the world as the holy Me'or Vashemesh after the title of his most famous work, raises a key question regarding Rashi's explication of our verse: "What do we learn by being told that this [specific] *parasha* was taught in the assembly of Israel - is it not logical to assume that all *mitzvot* that are universally practiced by the Jewish people were stated

before our entire nation?” (*Me’or Vashemesh*, Parashat Kedoshim, this and the following translations my own) The answer the *Me’or Vashemesh* provides offers us a deeper understanding of the connection that obtains between the phrases, “entire congregation of Israel” and “you shall be holy,” and informs our comprehension of the *pasuk* (verse) in an entirely new fashion:

And this is the proper explanation of our *pasuk*: “And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the entire congregation of the children of Israel’...” As Rashi elucidates, “[This] teaches us that this passage was stated in the assembly [of the entire congregation of Israel]...” This means, that this parasha - i.e. that of “and you shall be holy” [was specifically said] amongst the entire Jewish people, since it is impossible for a person to merit the highest heights of *kedushah* (holiness) unless they will be joined together in a gathering of the overall community in the service of Hashem. Why is this the case? [As Rashi teaches us]: “because most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah are dependent on it.” – i.e. *tefilah b’tzibur* (public prayer), and *mitzvot* which are similar in kind [that require a community for their fulfillment].

Clearly, for the *Me’or Vashemesh*, *kedushah* can only be achieved in the context of the *tzibur*. As such, any notion of ascetic withdrawal from the community is anathema to the authentic Torah way of life - a concept that he crystalizes in the following passage:

The text concludes and states: “You shall be holy,” which Rashi interprets as “and you shall be separate.” To clarify: This *parasha* was commanded to the Jewish people in order for them to be holy [as a corporate entity]; a person could mistakenly believe, however, that the correct exposition of “and you shall be holy” is that individuals should remove and separate themselves from the *tzibur* – and only then will they achieve authentic *kedushah*.

The deeply insightful analysis of the *Me’or Vashemesh* is consonant with Hillel’s well-known statement in *Pirkei Avot*: “*Al tifrosh min hatzibur*” (“Do not separate yourself from the community,” II:4) In his discursive analysis of this phrase, Rabbi Israel Lipschitz (1782-1860), known as the Tiferet Yisrael after the name of his classic commentary on the *Mishnah*, challenges us to recognize Hillel’s aphorism for what it truly is, namely, a directive to engage in all aspects of communal activity for the betterment of the *tzibur* and, ultimately for the benefit of the entire Jewish people.

With Hashem's help and guidance, may each of us strive to implement Hillel's stirring words in our lives, and may we thereby be *zocheh* (merit) to see the fulfillment of the *pasuk*: "I shall be sanctified amidst the children of Israel. I am the L-rd Who sanctifies you." (*Sefer Vayikra* 22:32) May this time come soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of 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* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** 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.