

## Parshas Kedoshim – Edward Glyn (reprint)

ו אייר תשע"ו – 14<sup>th</sup> May 2016 – שבת פי קדושים

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***"Everyone's Judaism is to live a life of purity as defined by our Torah" – Rabbi Dovid Cohn (recent press quote).***

Kedoshim is one of the five most mitzvah-rich parshiot in the Torah with 13 positive mitzvot and 38 prohibitions mentioning such multifarious subjects as respect for ones parents, grudge bearing, tattoos, gluttony, peyot and the practice of divination. Just as Kedoshim contains both positive and negative commandments, our own holiness can only be realised through both the performance of good deeds and the eradication of our internal negative traits. Many mitzvot mentioned in Kedoshim have been illustrated previously but whereas before we may have given details on "what" we must or mustn't do, Kedoshim is more an instruction manual as to "how" the fundamentals of these various principles must be implemented and how we, as a people, must strive to ingrain in ourselves the eponymous 'holiness'.

Rashi expands on the importance of Kedoshim by explaining that whereas most laws in the Torah were channeled to the Bnei Yisrael via Moshe to Aharon and then through the sages, the teachings of Kedoshim were delivered directly from Moshe to the Bnei Yisrael, "because most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah depend on it."

Working in a large, multinational and multi-cultured organisation I'm often faced with diverse questions from colleagues about being a practicing Jew. Some are simply inquisitive – "why do you always talk to yourself when you come out the bathroom?", whereas some border on the unbelieving – "but how can you and the whole community possibly cause the sun to set artificially early on a Friday night in the summer months?" One question that often arises is "what does it mean to be a Jew?" Here Rabbi Akiva's principle "Ve'ahavta Le'rayacha Kamocha Ani Hashem," "You shall love your neighbour as yourself, I am Hashem" (Vayikra 19:18) always comes to mind and this usually satisfies my colleagues' question.

The above principle often gives rise to another question though, which is the ending of the passuk "I am Hashem." What does it mean and what relevance has it to loving ones neighbour? In Sefer Ahavat Shalom, it is explained that the word "love" or "ahava" has a gematria of 13, parity to the gematria of "echad", meaning "one." He continues to explain that we are all compelled to consider one another with the same love as we bestow upon ourselves. Only once we achieve this "double love or "love containing mutual reciprocity" do we manage to enter into our true partnership with Hashem. "Ahava" with it's gematria of 13 times by 2 = 26, has the same value of Hashem's name (Yud Hay Vav Hay).

Kedoshim Tihyu, was given to the Bnei Yisrael in a mass public gathering to emphasize that our obligation to achieve holiness must be in the context of the community. This principle of "All for one and one for all" or "Echad" should be with us always as we remember that it was only through being "Ke'ish Echad Belev Echad" "Like one man with one heart" did we merit to be recipients of the Torah. It may be pertinent for us to reflect on whether we ourselves would have warranted being part of the community that received the Torah.

Do we always have our priorities right? Do we treat each other with enough chessed? Do we harbour nefarious thoughts? Are we too relaxed in speaking Lashan Hara? Do we rush to the back of the shul as soon as we have finished the silent Amidah to partake in garrulous gossip? Do we give with a pure and good heart when people ask us for money in shul on a Sunday at Shacharit or become irascible, pass a look of disdain or reply in acerbic tone rather than thank Hashem with all our heart, all our soul and all our might that He has given us the opportunity to help one less fortunate? Perhaps we should be as equally focused in our dealings with each other and have respect for our teachers, as we are careful and pedantic when choosing which of the many Pesach hechsherim to rely upon.

Some secular sources have explored the nature of the human psyche with regards to the effects of surveillance and how workers perform with greater efficiency when they are aware that they are being watched by their superiors. Hundreds of years earlier Tractate Megillah (25a) taught us that "Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for the fear of Heaven itself." We are being watched constantly; our thoughts, our actions, our tefillot. During Sefirat Ha'omer, let us remember this the next time we objurgate or gossip about one of our fellows and instead make the most of the possibilities for spiritual ascendancy over the next few weeks.

Shabbat Shalom.