

Kedoshim

Clang the Tools Louder, Guys, or the Spirits will Get You!

Speak to the children of Israel and tell them, “Be holy for I, Hashem your God, am holy.”

Vaykira 19:2

The Midrash⁵⁶⁰ teaches:

“You shall be holy” – this is what we are taught in Tehillim; “He will send assistance to you from *kodesh* [holiness].”⁵⁶¹ R. Berachya taught in the name of R. Simone: There was a story in my city involving Abba Yossi from Tzitor, who was sitting by a spring when the local spirit revealed itself to him, and said to him, “You know how many years I have dwelled here. You and your wives come and go, night and day, and are never damaged at all. But now, you should know that an evil spirit is attempting to dwell here and damage people.” So, Abba Yossi asked the spirit, “What are we to do?” And the spirit said, “Go and tell the people of your town about this. Tell anyone who has a hammer,⁵⁶² a spade or a shovel, that they should come out to this spot tomorrow at the very beginning of the morning. They should look at the surface of the water, and when they see a disturbance in the water, they should begin to rattle their iron tools, and call out ‘*didan natzach*’ [ours has won]. They should keep this up until they see a drop of blood on the surface of the water [which is a sign that the evil spirit was killed.⁵⁶³]” The man went and told the people in his town what to do, and the next morning, they all came out, and when they saw a disturbance in the water, they began to bang on their iron tools and call out “*didan natzach*” [ours has won]. They did not stop until they saw a drop of blood on the water’s surface. Now, it would follow that if spirits, who were not created with any need for assistance from others, can nevertheless use assistance, we humans, who were created to be dependent upon other people’s assistance, can use assistance so much more. This is what it means that Hashem sends His assistance out of holiness.

Fascinating as the Midrash is, it is still somewhat perplexing. The Midrash teaches the value of assistance, how what sports fans call Home Field Advantage is really something that works. We learn that when someone feels backed up and supported, he performs more effectively. But what on earth does this Midrash have to do with the commandment to “be holy”? Where

560 Vayikra Rabbah 24:3

561 Tehillim 20:3

562 “*Makush*.” See Jastrow, who renders this word “hammer,” but suggests also “hoe” and “knocker.”

563 *Etz Yosef*, ad loc.

do we find any talk about holiness here?

Rabbi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students, from Geves all the way to Antiparis.⁵⁶⁴ They all died in one period of time, for they did not treat one another with the proper respect.⁵⁶⁵ Every year, we mourn the loss of the students for the first thirty-two days of the Omer, the period during which when they all died. On the 33rd day, their deaths stopped. *Kavod*, the word for “respect,” is numerically equivalent to 32, the number of days during which they died.⁵⁶⁶ Rabbi Akiva, who was the source of the Oral Torah,⁵⁶⁷ was not able to get anywhere with these students who did not respect one another. He nearly died as well,⁵⁶⁸ but was ultimately saved to pass on the *mesorah* to his five new students, who went on to be five of the greatest Rabbis of the Talmud.⁵⁶⁹ Each year, as we involve ourselves in the Omer process, preparing to accept the Torah on Shavuot, we once again remember this mistake of Rabbi Akiva’s original students. Why is this so imperative to the accepting of the Torah?

R Akiva’s 24,000 students weren’t referred to as 24,000, but rather 12,000 pairs. They were meant to be working together,⁵⁷⁰ and since they could not, due to the lack of proper respect, they failed to become the next links in the chain of Torah. The Torah – essentially a code of laws – is surprisingly very much about relationships. The first words that the Jewish people heard after getting the Torah were, “Go back to your tents”⁵⁷¹ – they were instructed by Hashem to go back and live life as married couples, rather than remaining separated. Only when the Jewish people were “as one people with one heart”⁵⁷² did they accept the Torah.

The reason for this is as follows: Just as a wedding anniversary is not a celebration for only one spouse, but both of them – it is not “Melvin’s anniversary,” but rather, the anniversary of the marriage of “Melvin and Gladys” – similarly, since the Torah was to be given to people, then as important as the Torah is, so, too, are the people it was given to. Without a person to be on the receiving end, there can be no *Shavuot*, and no giving of the Torah. And thus, each year, as we build toward the giving of the Torah, we learn that the nature of man, and his relationship with other people is vital. Just as no one can really accept the Torah if he doesn’t value it, so, too, no one can accept it without valuing human beings.

564 See also Yerushalmi, Taanis 4:5, and Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:69: “From Geves to Antiparis, there were 600,000 towns.

565 Yevamos 62b

566 Rema Mifano, *Maamar Maayan Ganim*, “Sefiras Haomer.” See there also that the Omer is divided into *lev*, the first 32 days, and *tov* (*gematria* 17), the last 17 days. Ramchal also writes this in his *Pinos Hamerkava*, *pinah* 2, published in the volume *Ginzei Ramchal*, p. 321. Also see *Bnei Yissaschar*, “Iyar,” 3:2.

567 R. Tzadok of Lublin, *Tzidkas Hatzaddik*, 77

568 Rema Mifano, *Maamar Maayan Ganim*, Sfiras Haomer, day 33. See also this author’s *Vaani Babashem Atzapeh* to Tehillim 21:5, and *Hatorah Hatemimah*, ad loc.

569 Rabbis Yehuda, Yosi, Meir, Shimon and Elazar.

570 I was gratified to see that R. Moshe Tzurriel (Weiss) in his *Otzarot Hatorah*, vol. 2, p. 704, makes the same observation.

571 Dvarim 5:27

572 Rashi, Shemos 19:2, s.v. *vayichan*

This is why the Jewish people had to have been unified at the giving of the Torah.

Rabbi Akiva taught, “Love your neighbor as yourself: this is a great rule of Torah.”⁵⁷³ This is Torah, nothing else. There are those who mistakenly think that Torah is merely about how green one’s lulav is, or how kosher his matzah is. These are all parts of Torah, but *fundamental* to Torah is loving other people. One without respect for others cannot pass along the tradition, for he has no real connection to Torah. Those 24,000 students died because they could not function as 12,000 pairs.

This is what it means to be holy. Most people would define holiness in all sorts of ascetic ways. But the notion that helping out others and offering them assistance is holy sounds bizarre to us. This is what the Midrash is teaching us, that Hashem sends help out of holiness. He is holy, and if we are to be holy, we have to help others.

We are so dependent upon others. Most of us could never, in a full lifetime, create even one shirt like the one that we are wearing right now, or one kitchen blender if we were left shipwrecked on an island. We all depend upon the hard work of others. And we thrive when others assist us. I have a friend who is, in my assessment, a very gaudy dresser, and yet, when he compliments my tie, I feel great. He has never yet picked a good tie for his own wardrobe, and still, I glow when he compliments mine! We need encouragement from others much more than anything in the spirit world does. Others need our encouragement, and we need to give it to them. That is holiness, and that is what it takes to receive the Torah.

573 *Toras Kobanim*, Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4; Rashi, Vaykira 19:18, s.v. *viahanta*.