

KEDOSHIM 1981

Holiness is one of the keys to understanding our religion. The word Kodosh permeates the religion. In Hebrew it is the consonants which determine the basic meaning of the words. The vowels just give you different shades of meaning. The word Kosov means to write, Keetaiv, to inscribe. Heechteev, to dictate and Hetkateev, to correspond. In Hebrew the word kiddush, kadish, Kiddusheen, and kadosh are all the same word. Kiddush means to sanctify time, kadish when we sanctify memory, the time people spent with us, Kiddusheem marriage, and kodosh martyr. The opposite of kodosh in Hebrew is Challed which can mean to be hollow and and space. Judaism is mainly a religion which deals with time. Other religions deal with space. We're more concerned with time. We, in the past, haven't been very concerned with building huge cathedrals. We've been concerned with building temples in time. That's what Shabbos really is, a temple in time. It's not the restrictions, per se, which are important but the temple in time which it creates. If we could build a house without walls we would do it. If we could have the same warmth, security, and privacy we would. But we can't. The same thing applies to Shabbos. We can't feel its warmth without the restrictions. We Jews are concerned with time because time is different than space. Space is reversible but time isn't. You can buy somebody's property, sell it to another person and the original owner could buy it back from him. Time, once it is gone, is gone. We have to learn how to manage our time. All we really are is a time clock which every so often shoots off another batch of hormones which change us and eventually cause our cells to stop reproducing. Holiness is concerned with time. Using our time well. It mentions 4 times in this week's Torah portion. You shall be holy. To my way of thinking, there are 4 basic drives in a human being, the will to pleasure, the will to power, the will to security, and the will toward meaning. All of these drives can corrupt us and make us lose our holiness. The will to power is discussed in the first part of the Sedra. You should fear father and mother, even if you have power over them, you

should respect them. Many times people abuse the power they have even though they claim they're using their power only to help this or that institution. The second you shall be holy (20.7) is found right after the admonition not to consult necromancers, etc. Sometimes a person's will to security causes him to do all sorts of terrible things. There is no ultimate security in life. The next you shall be holy concerns itself with the will to pleasure, sexual relations. Finally at the end of the Sedra we learn about the will to meaning. Right after we have learned how the Jewish people have been set apart from others we learn you shall be holy. Sometimes people use religion only to satisfy their selfishness. It gives them so much intellectual pleasure. They use it to look down their noses at others. Holiness means that all our drives must be done the right way. The word Kedosh, itself, teaches us that. The first letter Kuf means community. Our drives must never separate ourselves from relationships. Daled stands for Daf, learning. Holiness requires that we constantly learn. Vav stands for continuity between the generations and Shin stands for time. If we have all these elements, if our drives have all these components then we will be able not only to earn a living but also to live. The modern world, unfortunately, has forgotten about holiness. Modern life has been described as breakfast in Paris, lunch in Moscow, dinner in Hong Kong, luggage in Peoria. We need our luggage. We need holiness.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Many times people come to me and say, "Rabbi, I want to belong. I am new in town or I have been away from the Jewish community for a long time and I want to belong. Something is missing in my life. Nobody really cares whether I am living or dead. It really does not make any difference to anybody what I do." This feeling of rootlessness, of not belonging causes them great anguish and many times even boils over into rage. "Notice me, make me feel that I, too, am important", they seem to thunder at you.

How, though, does a person belong? How can a person feel that he is part of something? Many sociologists today tell us that one of the reasons for our evermounting crime waves is because people do not feel that they belong. They do not feel that they are part of society, therefore, they feel justified in taking anything they can, any way they can since there is no way they can be part of the total group. Paradoxically, the only way a person can feel that he belongs is by sensing and assuming limitations. In order to belong to a sorority or fraternity, young people are willing to submit to all sorts of foolish procedures in order to belong to the group. In other words, unless they are called upon to sacrifice for the group and to adopt certain rules and procedures, they do not feel that they belong. In order to belong a person must show that he has somehow earned the right to belong and that his contribution is needed by the group.

I am reminded of the pathetic story of a young man who wanted to join a fraternity. When he was blackballed for no good reason he turned to the authorities. They determined that since this fraternity was a non-profit organization this group would have to accept him. He was very happy until he found out that by his going to the authorities not only he, but everyone else would also have to be accepted. He looked at the judge and said, "You mean everybody can be accepted? That's not the kind of fraternity I want to belong to." He wanted to belong but he did not want that if everybody else could automatically belong, too. He, of course, was wrong but it shows clearly that belonging means limitations, the limiting of others to belong and the limiting of your own behavior. In order to belong a person must accept upon himself the rules and obligations of the group, otherwise he will never be able to feel that he can belong. He must also feel personally responsible for all the

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members of the group. The urge to belong, of course, can be misused and turned into a terrible vehicle of prejudice and hatred.

In Judaism everyone is free to belong, but you must assume your responsibilities as a Jew. Nobody is ever excluded. Anyone who assumes his responsibilities is immediately included, but you cannot feel you belong unless you assume responsibilities as a Jew, unless you feel responsibility for every other Jew and for the activities of your Congregation. It does no good in Judaism to say that you love your religion but then fail to assume responsibilities for your fellow Jews and fail to live a Jewish life-style. You cannot love Judaism and the Jewish people unless you love individual Jews, unless you relate to them and want to help them and want to be with them. People who come to me and say that they want to belong are very welcome, but unless they participate in the Synagogue's activities and unless they feel personally responsible for the Jewish destiny here in Houston and throughout the world, they will never feel that they belong.

In Judaism we exclude no one. The reason many scholars say the English lost their empire was because no matter what the natives would do they would always be excluded. They were never made to feel that they could become a member of the elite. Certain clubs, beaches, etc. were restricted to English only. This type of exclusion enrages people and foments revolution. Judaism has always been a religious democracy. We have always said that a person would always be accepted and could rise to any position in the community if he assumed his responsibilities, lived a Jewish life, and learned about the Jewish tradition.

Pretty soon the holiday of Shavuot will be here. The Rabbis teach us that all the souls of all the Jewish throughout history were present at Mt. Sinai when the Ten Commandments and Torah was given. The Torah was and is accessible to everyone. The Ten Commandments were not given just to one or two people, but to the assembled Jewish people in front of Mt. Sinai. Everyone can belong. Everyone can make a contribution. We just have to assume our responsibilities. One of the most frustrating things in the world is to have someone always do things for you but never permit you to do anything for him. This eventually leads

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to hatred. The person who receives and is not allowed to give anything in return soon becomes bitter. We, in America, sometimes wonder why all the people we have aided hate us. One of the reasons, I believe, is because we have not allowed them to give us anything. We have sent Peace Corps overseas to train other nations, but we have not indicated any way we could learn from them. We were the ones who could teach. We had nothing to learn from them. This attitude shows that the person receiving does not belong. This excludes him. This will, in the end, cause very generous, good people to be hated for no real good reason.

It is important that everyone in the community be allowed to make a contribution, to participate no matter what their level of ability, learning, means, or even commitment. If they want to participate and if they show that they want to participate by accepting certain obligations and responsibilities, then we must let them participate. Judaism is open to everyone. In the Torah portion, Kedoshim, we learn that when Moshe was to teach the principles of holiness he was to speak to all the people. "Speak unto all the Congregation of the Children of Israel, you shall be holy for I, the Lord Your G-d, am holy." Every Jew can be holy and every Jew can belong. He just has to want to.

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In Judaism the essence of life is to be holy, to separate ourselves from things which are bad, to devote ourselves to things beyond ourselves, not to live selfishly. Unfortunately in our day everybody wants self this and self that and they are only interested in their selfish pursuits. That is not the Jewish idea of holiness which is to reach out to others, to help them. The story about a man who was soliciting for UJA. He called a very rich man and he said, "You must give to UJA". The man said "You don't understand". The solicitor said, "What don't I understand?". The man said, "My father is in a mental institution and it costs \$2000 a month to keep him there. My mother is in an old folks home and it costs \$1500 to keep her there. My sister just had an operation for \$20,000. My brother needs psychiatric care and it costs \$100 a visit, and if I don't help them, you think I should help you?" Selfishness is a curse which only leads to unhappiness.

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In the Torah portion Kedoshim we learn, "Kedoshim Teeyu" "You shall be holy as I am the Lord Your G-d is holy." In Judaism we are told to imitate G-d. Just as G-d clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, and upholds those who fall, so must we do the same thing. The question can be asked, how can we have any relationship with G-d? In Judaism we teach that G-d is completely other and different from us. In fact, the Rambam says that anything you say about G-d is, He is not. G-d does not have our form or mind. Things that are impossible to man are possible to G-d. G-d is completely different than us. How can we have a relationship with Him? That's what we refer to when we say "Kedosh Kedosh Kedosh, G-d is holy." He is different from us. In philosophical language, this means He is transcended. How then can we have any relationship with someone who does not have our mind and form or problems? However, we in Judaism say we can have a relationship with G-d because there is a piece of G-d within each of us. It is the Neshoma, or soul. G-d is in all of us. That's what we speak about when we use the philosophical term, imminent. G-d is both imminent and transcendent. In our day and age people have tried to live their lives in such a way that they do not feel that they had to be holy, that they had to have any relationship with G-d or imitate G-d in any way. They live their lives just to please themselves, to get any pleasure they can out of life. This type of life, though, is not satisfying. People who only pursue their own interests end up many times alienated and lonely. Look at the Kennedy boy who just died presumably from an overdose of drugs, and his older brother who is also on drugs. Why should these boys have needed drugs? They have everything. They have all the means to develop any talents that they have. The best education in the country is available to them. They can do or be anything they wanted. It is true their father was killed when they were young, but they have a loving family which surrounds them with everything they needed, but somehow there is still a void. In this Torah portion we read "Kedoshim Teeyu" "You will be holy." I would think that the verse should read "Kedoshim Hay Yu." It should be a command. Instead it says "Kedoshim Teeyu" "You will be holy." It is not a command. It is explaining our position in life. Either we will be holy or we will be self-hating,

people who are miserable with ourselves and with others. Also the expression "Kedoshim Teeyu" is in the plural. In order to be holy we must have relationships with others. That's why so many things in this Torah portion are said in the plural. "Lo Tig Novu" "You shall not steal." "Belote Chachashe" "You shall not deal falsely." "Belot Seshachru" "You shall not lie." Why are these admonitions stated in the plural? It means only when both parties in the contract lie that it is wrong? No, it means that when you lie you destroy not only your relationship with another person but also with G-d. You alienate yourself further from the soul within you. You become more desperate and in need of drugs or alcohol to still your conscience. In Judaism we believe that life is with people. You need other people to develop yourself. You must know how to relate to them in order to have a relationship with G-d. It is not enough just to pray to G-d. In fact, there is no comparison between praying at home or praying in the minyon. It is so much more meaningful when you pray in a minyon, not when you just sit back, but participate. Of course, when you cannot make a minyon you should pray at home, but the experience is so much more when you pray at a minyon. We Jews do not believe in any silent meditation with the Divine. This only can help prepare us to be with people so we can have a real religious experience. It is like when Abraham was talking to G-d. All of a sudden he told G-d to wait so he could take care of the needs of three strangers. He could feel G-d so much better when he was helping others and was with others. Holiness comes in Judaism through working with others. The sparks of G-d that are in each of us ignite into a greater flame when we work together. We do not believe in relics or contrived mystic experiences through drugs or other means in order to feel G-d's or life's meaning. G-d can just be felt when we work with others to help make this a better world. The story about a man who wanted to feel Judaism, his religion, so he went to the Land of Israel to participate in an archeological dig. Someone said, "You know, I found the skull of King David and will sell it to you for \$10,000." The man was greatly impressed and bought it. The next year he went back again.

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He was approached by the same man who asked him if he wanted to buy the skull of King David, but instead of showing him a big skull he showed him a small skull.

The man said, "What do you mean? Last year you sold me the skull of King David."

The man answered, "I know, but that was the skull of King David as a man. This is the skull of him as a boy." All religious experiences, all mind experiences which do not flow from leading a moral life by working together with others are dangerous and false and can only lead to tragedy, like with the Kennedy boy.

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The keynote of Judaism is to be holy. Holiness is what is required. This term today has a perjorative quality. We tend to think of holy rollers, etc. when we think of the term "holy." Actually, the Jewish conception of holiness is different from the ordinary conception of what holy means. In the Torah portion Kedoshim we read how G-d spoke to Moshe saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the Sons of Israel and you should say to them, 'Holy you should be because holy am I, the Lord your G-d.'" It is interesting to note that G-d told Moshe to gather together all the Jewish people. This is not the normal way that Moshe taught the Torah to the Jewish people. He first used to teach it to Aaron, then to Aaron and his sons, then to Aaron and the sons and the elders, and afterwards to let them teach the people, but in this case these precepts of holiness were so important that he was to teach all the people. This was to emphasize the fact that all the people were holy, just as G-d is holy. The basis of the Jewish concept of holiness is that it is obtainable and reachable by everyone. In other religions and philosophies only certain people who are mystically inclined can be holy. Mysticism can be a way to achieve holiness. After all, that's the way the rabbis explain Yitzchok's role in our religion. He obtained holiness through a mystical experience. Many times young people today feel they have to join other religions because they do not feel that Judaism offers them a personal religious experience. This is false. Judaism most certainly offers a personal religious experience to those who are mystically inclined. However, as in the past, this can lead to great depravities if it is not directed in the right way. Abraham, the symbol of loving kindness, and Jacob, the symbol of learning and struggling in the real world, are also paths to holiness. Holiness is accessible to all. The basis of the Jewish view of holiness is

that everybody is unique and, just as G-d is unique and special, so is everyone unique and special. No one should ever feel that he does not make a contribution. The corollary to this, of course, is that everybody else is unique and special, too, and must be treated with respect. Holiness also demands not only a personal consciousness, a purity and upright behavior, but also a social conscience. That's why this chapter, which deals with holiness, deals with personal morality and social justice. You cannot have one without the other. In the west where the belief in personal salvation is paramount, where to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, ideas of personal morality and social justice have been separated. It was thought in the Middle Ages that the only thing that really counted was personal morality, personal purity. During the Renaissance and after the Reformation people rebelled against the teachings of the church and then social morality was contrasted to personal morality. Personal morality was not important any more. It was social morality which counted. This dichotomy has persisted to this very day. We have the typical stereotype which we all recognize of the clean living, upright, church going young man who is very concerned about personal morality, but opposes all social programs even social security to make society just, while, on the other hand, we have the image of the hippie with loose morals and who is probably on drugs, who believes firmly in all sorts of social programs for society but has no personal morality. This dichotomy is antithetical to the Jewish concept of things. When the Jews came to this country they could not even understand it. Now, of course, there are many Jews who, themselves, have adopted it. They have loose personal standards and are very high on social programs. This is, of course, against Judaism. That's why in this Torah portion Kedoshim ideas of personal morality and social justice

are intertwined. You cannot have one without the other. Holiness also demands that we be able to make distinctions. That's why at the end of the Sedra it says, "and you shall distinguish between clean animals and unclean animals...". The whole concept of separating and making distinctions is vital. Unfortunately, there are too many people who use a wide brush to analyze situations. They do not understand that it is necessary to make distinctions. Without making distinctions we cannot function properly in this world. There is a difference between the SS and ordinary army soldiers. The SS were murderers. They were set up to kill innocent civilians, our people, the Jews of Europe. Simon Wiesenthal in his book The Sunflower tells the story of how a German officer on his deathbed asked that a Jew be brought to his side. He wanted to be forgiven for all the terrible crimes he had committed against the Jewish people, for the hundred of thousands of Jews he killed. Simon Wiesenthal happened to be that Jew who was called to his deathbed. The German officer asked Simon Wiesenthal to forgive him for murdering so many Jews. Simon refused. He said nothing. He was, of course, beaten, but he still said nothing. The German officer asked him again, and this time before Simon had a chance to answer he died. This question was then submitted before a group of Jewish and Christian theologians, whether Simon Wiesenthal should have forgiven this soldier. There was a very interesting split between the Jewish and Christian theologians. No matter what the denomination of the Jewish and Christian theologians, the Jewish theologians said, almost to a man, that Simon Wiesenthal did the right thing by not answering the man, while the Christian theologians said he should have forgiven him. Christianity and Judaism are two different traditions. Judaism teaches that if someone comes

before a rabbi and says, "I hit Sam Goldberg," the rabbi cannot forgive him. The man has to go to Sam Goldberg and ask for forgiveness.

Simon Wiesenthal, according to our tradition, could not forgive this Nazi officer. He was not the one who was harmed or killed by him.

Only the people who were harmed and killed could forgive him or G-d, not Simon Wiesenthal. In the Christian religion apparently third

parties can forgive a person for an act against the second party.

Perhaps this whole controversy about Bitburg brings this distinction

to the fore. President Reagan is a good man and has been a good

friend to us. He has just been insensitive to our tradition. Maybe

he feels he can forgive the SS. We feel that is only G-d's prerogative

or the people who were harmed or killed. It is important to make

distinctions if you want to be holy. Holiness demands that each

of us realize that we are unique and special and so are all other

human beings, and also demands that we be personally pure and work

for a just society and learn to make distinctions. If we do then

we truly can become a holy people. I am reminded of the story they

tell about a rabbi who was giving a speech about how charity was

so important and everybody should give one-tenth of their income to

charity. The rabbi was making such a passionate speech that one

of his supporters got up in the back of the room and said, "Rabbi,

that's not enough. People should give a twentieth." Twenty is not

always bigger than ten when you are talking about fractions. We

should all learn to make distinctions.

