

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Kedoshim

Being Holy

קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ בִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

Speak to the assembly of Bnei Yisrael and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, Hashem, your God, am holy (19:2)

Commenting on this pasuk, the Toras Kohanim¹ makes the following statement:

לֵאמֹר, אִם מְקַדְּשִׁים אַתֶּם עַצְמְכֶם, מֵעַלָּה אֲנִי עֲלֵיכֶם כִּאִילוֹ קִדְשְׁתֶּם אוֹתִי

This means, if you sanctify yourselves I consider it as if you sanctified Me.

According to this interpretation, when the pasuk mentions our holiness together with that of Hashem, it means not that our holiness is a *result* of His, but rather that it can *bring it about!*

This is a very striking statement, indeed! Is Hashem's holiness not inherently complete? In what way can it said to be "brought about" by our holiness?

RECOGNITION OF HASHEM IN THE HIGHER AND LOWER REALMS

The Meshech Chochmah explains. Both angels and human beings have the capacity to recognize and apprehend Hashem's greatness. The difference between the two is that the angels' apprehension of Hashem is embedded within their very nature – there exists no possibility of them failing to recognize Him. In contrast, while human beings are also capable of this recognition, it is something they must choose to do. Man is described by the Torah as being created "בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים – in the likeness of God."² This "likeness" refers to the faculty of free-will which man alone shares with his Creator.³ All other beings – both in higher and lower realms – are directed and circumscribed by their nature, whatever that nature may be. The uniquely human faculty of free-will allows man to decide whether he

¹ *Kedoshim, Parshah 1.*

² *Bereishis 1:27.*

³ [See Meshech Chochmah to Bereishis ibid.]

wishes to recognize Hashem as the Creator and Guide of the world.

At a critical point in world history, while most people were failing to recognize Hashem as both Creator and Director of the world, Avraham began the process of perceiving and apprehending Hashem and His greatness. The level of apprehension which Avraham achieved through choice equaled that which the celestial beings experience by virtue of their nature. This process continued through the Avos and culminated in their descendants – Bnei Yisrael – being chosen to receive the Torah, a means through which this awareness could be continually accessed, developed and expressed within the practical events and experiences of physical life.

TORAH, MITZVOS AND KEDUSHAH

Hashem's holiness in and of itself is perfect and complete. It is not in any way dependent on or affected by recognition by another being or the lack thereof. However, the *measure of that holiness which enters the world* is entirely dependent upon the thoughts and actions of those who inhabit the world. The process on our part which generates this increase is itself called "*kedushah*" and the Program which allows for it to happen is the Torah.

At the heart of the mitzvos of the Torah, and the overarching vision which informs and envelopes them, is the concept of Kedusah. The term "hekdesch," well known from the context of discussions relating to the Beis HaMikdash, essentially refers to dedicating something to the domain of On High. This is what mitzvos are meant to do as well. By relating to and interacting with every aspect of physical life in a Godly way, we sanctify it. This idea impacts all spheres of life, whether it is the produce of the land upon which we live through the mitzvos of Eretz Yisrael, our bodies through our actions, our minds and hearts through our thoughts and feelings, or time itself through sanctifying the festivals – elevating those occasions through the medium of korbanos. As the Toras Kohanim puts it elsewhere:⁴ "Nothing exists that does not have a mitzvah relevant to it." All of this serves to dedicate life in its entirety to the domain of On High – to *hekdesch*.

In response to this kedushah on our part, Hashem reveals more of His kedushah in the world. This is apparent in the miracles which occur in the Beis HaMikdash specifically, as well as in enhanced spirituality and increased blessing in the world generally. This means that, ultimately, the correct choices and sanctified living of Bnei Yisrael bring about an increase in the quality of life for the entire world. Indeed, the pasuk which recounts the creation of Man refers to him as a "נפש חיה."⁵ These words are commonly translated as "a living soul." However, the Meshech Chochmah explains that man as the *Tzelem Elokim*, who, through his choices has the power to increase Hashem's kedushah and blessing in the world, is in fact "a soul of life," i.e., he is the soul that promotes life in the world!

4 *Mechilta d'Miluim sec. 23.*

5 *Bereishis 2:7.*

APPREHENDING KEDUSHAH AND INCREASING KEDUSHAH

It emerges that Bnei Yisrael's recognition and apprehension of Hashem is qualitatively different than that of the celestial beings, since it is the product of their free will. This ultimately leads to two very different relationships with kedushah itself. Whereas angels – in their capacity of Hashem's emissaries in the governing of the world – are capable of *apprehending* Hashem's kedushah, as well as functioning as conduits *transmitting* it to the world, it is only Bnei Yisrael who are capable of *increasing* His kedushah in the world!

This, then, is the meaning of the statement of the Toras Kohanim, quoted above, that our kedushah is “the cause” of Hashem's Kedushah. In other words, the degree to which we sanctify ourselves and our lives affects the degree to which Hashem's kedushah is revealed in this world.

The reverse side of this is that, should Bnei Yisrael abuse their faculty of free-will and fail to recognize Hashem and to live their lives sanctified accordingly, this world will be correspondingly devoid of Kedushah and blessing. Although the higher realms will continue to recognize Hashem, as is their nature, He will, so to speak, take little comfort in this. In such situations, Chazal relate that Hashem says “קלני מראשי קלני מזרועי – *My Head ails Me, My Arm ails Me.*”⁶ The “Head” here refers to the abstract, spiritual realm of angels that apprehend Hashem, while the “Arm” refers to the constellations through which Hashem governs the world. Hashem is saying that the apprehension of the beings in these higher realms cannot compensate for the lack of recognition on the part of human beings in the lower realms.

THE KEDUSHAH OF U'VA LE'TZION

This idea will give us deeper appreciation of the section which we say towards the end of *Shacharis*, known as *Kedushah d'Sidrah*, where we recite the pesukim of Kedushah and then recite them again in Aramaic. The Gemara⁷ makes a most startling statement, namely, that in the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, the continued existence and function of the world are due in large measure to the recitation of this Kedushah! Why is this section so important and why is its role not fulfilled by the Kedushah which we say in the chazzan's repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei?

The Meshech Chochmah explains. While the Jewish people can bring about an increase of kedushah in the world through holy actions generally, there are certain things which are especially effective in bringing this increase about. Foremost among them are korbanos, which elevates every level of existence and brings the Diving Presence close. In the absence of korbanos, this role is primarily fulfilled by the prayers and praise of the Jewish People, which are overtly dedicated to recognizing Hashem.

The Kedushah of the Chazzan's repetition takes place while we are yet praying. In this context, we are looking to *emulate* the angel's in their recognition of Hashem. Hence, we introduce that Kedushah by saying:

נקדש את שמך בעולם כשם שמקדישים אותו בשמי מרום

Let us sanctify Your name in the world, in the way they sanctify it in the heavens on high

6 *Sanhedrin 46b.*

7 *Sotah 49a.*

However, having completed our tefillah, we then state that our recognition of Hashem through prayer and praise has achieved more than that of the angels; for it was the result of our free will and hence, is capable of *generating* the influx of Kedushah and Divine blessing into the world. Therefore, we introduce this Kedushah by reciting the pasuk:⁸

אַתָּה קָדוֹשׁ יוֹשֵׁב תְהִלּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל

And You are Holy, You rest on the praises of Israel

The Meshech Chochmah explains these words to mean: “You, Hashem, who are infinitely Holy, ‘reside’ – i.e., Your Sanctity fills the world – as a result of the praises of Israel”! This effect of increasing kedushah can be achieved only by the praises of Yisrael, not even by those of the angels. Indeed, concludes the Meshech Chochmah, it is for this reason we repeat these pesukim in Aramaic, for as we know, we say things in Aramaic when we do not wish to arouse the jealousy of the angels, and there is no more coveted position than the one enjoyed by Israel, whose acts of recognizing Hashem serve to increase His Sanctity and Blessing in the world.

8 *Tehillim 22:4.*