

בשבת

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WHAT IS HOLY?

Among the many *mitzvos* contained in *Parshas Kedoshim*, we find the well known directive, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”¹ On the face of it, the *passuk* is creating a connection between the holiness of the Master of the Universe and the holiness of every individual. Much like I am holy, says Hashem, you too should be holy.

However, Hashem’s very nature is totally different and apart from anything any human being can ever conceive. Hashem’s holiness is something no human being can come close to, by our very nature we are involved in our world — in what capacity can a person mimic Hashem’s sublime divinity?

Reb Nota Greenblatt² (1926–2022) explains that we are misunderstanding Hashem’s message. Of course Hashem is totally separate and distinct from any human experience. Yet, writes Reb Nota, Hashem still watches over and guides our individual lives. Hashem’s holiness is not a contradiction to His involvement in this world. He cares about *Klal Yisrael* like a father cares about his son, but at the same time is totally removed and unaffected by humanity.

Similarly, a Jew can live this dichotomous life. When events call for it, one can remove oneself from one’s surroundings. For example, during a *shiur*, or during *tefillah*, there is nothing that can distract or interfere with the focus one should have on the task at hand.

On the other hand, despite being involved in the most spiritual pursuits, one can and should feel the pain of others, seeking their good, and involving oneself in the betterment of the lives of others.

This is what Hashem is saying. “Be holy, for I am holy — I am totally removed and separate from humanity, yet I also carry and sustain every single person. You too, completely involve yourself in Torah and *mitzvos*, and at the same time, care for those around you.”

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

We tend to think there are two tracks, my own spiritual growth is the track of focusing on Torah, *mitzvos*, *tefillah*, and our closeness to Hashem.

Then there is the second track, the mundane aspects of our life, taking out the garbage, clearing the table, going to school or work, and so on.

However, the reality is there is only one track, and that is the track of *avodas Hashem*. Sometimes *avodas Hashem* is obvious, like the Torah we learn, and the *mitzvos* we do.

Sometimes it is more subtle, like taking out the garbage, or clearing the table. But even these day-to-day activities can be included in our spiritual growth, if we have the correct perspective.

As Reb Yisrael Salanter said,¹ “Another’s needs is my spirituality.” In other words, if we turn our focus to the needs of others, our clearing the table changes from a chore into a *chesed*. Doing so will change the way we view the humdrum of our life, turning it into a life of *avodas Hashem*.

¹ *Tenuas HaMussar*, Vol. I, pg. 346

¹ *Vayikra* 19:2

² *K’Rei’ach HaSadeh ibid.*

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The obligation to learn mussar even applies to those who are not obligated in learning Torah. - R’ Yisrael Salanter, *Tenuas HaMussar*, Vol. I, pg. 347

NACHAS

Mrs. Zalmanowitz* wasn't sure she was hearing correctly. "Yes, and then they said that it was worthwhile to move to the city just to hear my *shiur*," she heard her husband, Rabbi Yaakov Zalmanowitz, say. Rivka's eyebrows shot up. Last night her husband was honored at a dinner, and she knew he was squirming through every flowery speech that was singing his praises. He shied from the limelight, and felt very uncomfortable being the focus of attention.

And yet, here he was on the phone, repeating the entire event, focusing on every word of praise, every honor and award he received. What was going on?

"Well, before they handed me the plaque, one of the members of the crowd said he wanted to speak. It was off the cuff, but they got it on video. I can send it to you, if you'd like, it was really very nice."

Rivka remembered that as well. It was indeed nice, but she knew that Yaakov's face was red the entire time. And here he was, offering to share the video with someone.

The baby started crying and Rivka was unable to hear the rest of the conversation. Yaakov had already hung up the phone by the time she returned from the other room, which was fine, because Rivka was bursting with curiosity.

"What was that all about?"

"What do you mean?"

"Who were you talking to? I've never heard you talk like that, extolling your own virtues, repeating every nuance of every praise from last night. I liked it, but I didn't think it was something you enjoyed."

"Oh, that." Yaakov gave a shy smile. "First of all, everyone enjoys hearing their own praises, at least on some level. But that's not why I was reviewing the dinner. No, I was speaking to my mother."

"Oh," thought Rivka. Yaakov's mother was a widow, and lived in a different city. She took a lot of pride in her son, and was saddened by her inability to get to the dinner.

"My mother very much wanted to attend, but couldn't. So I tried remembering as much of it as I could, knowing she would want to hear. You know it's not my style at all, but how could I not make my mother happy?"

"You know it's not my style at all, but how could I not make my mother happy?"

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- The trait of taking no pleasure in this world should be exercised in regards to things that are forbidden.¹
- True *kedusha* is mixture of hard work and a gift from Hashem.²

¹ *Emunos V'Deos*, 10

² *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chap. 26