The Holy One blessed is He is exacting with those that
surround him (i.e. the very righteous) even to the extent of a
strand of hair" (Bava Kama 50a). In other words, G-d punishes those
closest to Him for even the most minor of infractions. The Toldos
Yitzchak (R Yitzchak Caro, who was R Yosef Caro's uncle) uses
this to explain the first verse in Parashas Acharei Mos; Nadav
and Avihu died for a (relatively) minor sin specifically "because
they were close to G-d" (Vayikra 16:1).

Why is it, though, that G-d plays
hardball with those closest to him? It
would seem that, if anything, He
should be tougher on those that are
not so righteous. Those that are very
righteous should perhaps be cut a
little slack, not treated harsher!

The Toldos Yitzchak brings three
reasons why G-d is more exacting
with those closest to him. The third
reason he brings (going in reverse
order) is that "a small sin is large for
someone that fears G-d and has
turned away from evil." It is precisely
because the individual has reached
such a high level that his sin is
considered so large. This could be
because more is expected of him, or
because the damage done by his
smaller sin is as great as or greater
than that of a larger sin committed by
another. This would certainly apply to
Nadav and Avihu, so it is possible
that they were punished with death
for doing something that might have
received a lesser punishment (or even
been overlooked) had it been done by
less righteous people.

The second reason given is that
being more exacting is actually bene-
fitical for the sinner, and is therefore a
G-d punishes the righteous in
smaller doses, for each little thing,
rather than letting them off the
hook until the big payback comes.

(sort of) favor that G-d does for the
more righteous. Rather than letting
the amount of punishment due pile up
and be given in one shot, He metes it
out little by little, as it is accumulated.
The Toldos Yitzchak expands upon a
parable used by the Talmud of a
wealthy individual that lent money to
two people.1 He collects from the one
he likes little by little, using smaller
payments to make it easier, whereas
from the one he dislikes he demands
payment in full – knowing that he
will be unable to pay and will be
jailed for defaulting. Similarly, G-d
punishes the righteous in smaller
doses, for each little thing, rather than
letting them off the hook until the big
payback comes.

This reason is interesting on
several fronts. First of all, unlike the
others, according to this the punish-
ment for the minor infraction
committed by the righteous is not
necessarily greater than that received
by the less righteous for the same
action. Only the timing is different
(immediate, in small doses vs. one
severe punishment for numerous sins
at once). It can be compared to the
Talmud’s explaining that G-d
punishes the righteous in this
world so that only reward
remains for the next world, and
pays any reward due to the
wicked in this world so that they
get none in the next2 (except that
the Toldos Yitzchak seems to be
comparing two ways of punishing in
this world, possibly because he is
comparing the righteous with the not-
as-righteous, while the Talmud is
comparing the righteous with the
wicked).

Rav Eliyahu Dessler3 also explains
that G-d is more exacting with those
close to Him for their own benefit, but
takes a different approach. He defines
one close to G-d as an individual that
serves G-d "lishmah" (i.e. for the
right reasons), and says that only
those on such a level merit indivi-
dualized divine supervision. This
"divine intervention" includes mes-
sages sent so that the individual will
examine (or re-examine) his deeds, in
order to improve them. By punishing
the righteous for even small mistakes,

1 Avodah Zarah 4a
2 Kiddushin 39b
3 Michtav me’Eliyahu II, pg. 75
the message is sent that this is an area that needs improvement.

It would seem that this approach, as well as the Toldos Yitzchak’s second reason, would not apply to Nadav and Avihu, as their punishment was immediate and severe. The first reason that the Toldos Yitzchak gives, though, would explain how their “closeness” to G-d caused their "minor" infraction to be dealt with so severely.

Just as Rav Dessler said that only those close to G-d merit His individualized supervision, the Toldos Yitzchak says that “the righteous are before Him at all times and He watches over them constantly. Therefore, every sin that he commits – even if it is a very small one – he gets punished for immediately. And he that is far from G-d [He] isn’t as concerned about sinning, and it is as if He doesn’t see it.”

Most of the time, the commentators (e.g. Rambam, Ramban, Rabbeinu Bachya) use the principle of G-d’s divine intervention being limited to those close to Him to explain how they are protected from the dangers that life presents (while others can suffer consequences beyond the specific punishments their actions deserve – as they actually deserve whatever happens to them as “punishment” for not reaching that level of closeness\(^4\)). The Toldos Yitzchak is adding that attaining that level provides not only divine protection, but also a higher standard to live up to. True, the only “punishments” will be those specifically deserved, but they include punishment for even minor infractions. And while this may often be beneficial (as it includes the reminder to improve that Rav Dessler refers to), it cost Nadav and Avihu their lives.

After giving his three reasons why G-d is more exacting with the righteous, the Toldos Yitzchak says that the Source comforted (the mourning) Aharon by telling him that it was only because his sons were so close to Him that they died. In the process, the Toldos Yitzchak provides us with great insight into how G-d runs the world.

\(^4\) Cf. Meiri on Sotah 2a

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**Bakeish Shalom**

I lived in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn when I was a teenager. Bound in and nourished by the sea, Brighton was sunny and bright in the summer, cold and crisp in the winter. A lower-middle-class neighborhood, it had no airs and made no assumptions. And while nearly everyone there was Jewish, almost no one was religious.

Brighton’s Jewish men smoked cigars, played cards, drank beer, worked hard, and loved their families – and the resplendent beach. And its Jewish women wore pants and light blouses everywhere, played canasta and bingo, ate well, kept a tidy home, and also loved their families and the beach.

But when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur came, all of Brighton was religious, and things like cigars and sunning oneself on the beach went by the waysides. Everyone was in shul.

Some could read Hebrew and follow along with the service but many could not; yet nearly all of them stayed for the long haul (except for the die-hard communists who only came for Kaddish).

The most magical moment to my mind was when all the Cohen, Katz, and Kagan men went up to duchen, and every one of them shone.

"Yevareichecha!" the chazan would call out, and the Kohanim would chant in all earnestness and fervor, "Yevareichecha!", and so on. And for a while, each one of them stood in the Beis HaMikdash with his alter zaida, benching Klal Yisrael in the presence of the Ribono Shel Olam.

By the time the Chazan called out "Shalom!" and they all responded "Shalom!" after a lengthy "Aay Yaay Yaay Yaay..." the air was fraught with out-and-out kedushah. We had all somehow been transported in time, place – and in madreiga. And everyone knew it.

2.

What exactly is kedushah, though? Terms like "holiness", "sacredness", and "saintliness" – which all denote the same thing but offer nothing new – come to mind. Yet we are told to be holy in this week’s parashah (Vayikrah 19:2). So we will obviously need help on this.

Interestingly enough, Rambam does not list being holy as a mitzvah per se, but depicts it instead as an overall goal of living the
The commentators offer many insights, of course. Some say it touches on our relationship to food, drink, and all other earthly delights, and offer that a holy person would not sully himself by indulging in forbidden things—or overindulging in permitted things (Rashi, Ramban). Others depict it as a charge to be in the world yet removed from it at the same time (Ohaiv Yisrael, Chiddushei HaRim, Chassam Sofer, as cited in Nachshoni’s Haga'os b’Parshiyos HaTorah). And yet others who are sensitive to the loftiness of perch required of someone who would be holy do indeed assure us that we each do have it within us to achieve it (Ohr HaChayim, as cited by Nachshoni; also see Hilchot Teshuvah 5: 2).

But that last point alludes to something that the commentators do not seem to address: what I would depict as an inherent human need to believe in actual holiness; full, rich, unalloyed, and refreshing piety. For there seems to be a thread along the lining of every human heart that never gives up hope in that; that knows somehow or another despite the cynical take we have on humanity in our age there are indeed holy people.

First each one of us would have to set out to truly sanctify him- or herself, and in the end G-d will see to it that we are indeed sanctified.

So let us explore the devices that the great and indeed holy Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto himself suggests we use to arrive at true kedushah.

3. First off, he portrays kedushah as a barometer of sorts of relative closeness to Hashem. Thus, the closer one is to Him (emotionally and devotionally), the holier he is. So we would need to strive for such closeness. He suggests elsewhere that holiness comes down to utter kindness and benevolence, which we would also do well to foster.

But he makes another point elsewhere that seems to sum it up

\[ \text{Ma'amor Ha'Ikkarim} \]

\[ \text{Adir BaMarom 1, pp. 194-195} \]

**REB JONATHAN BAKER**

Sefasai Tiftach

We are now in the period of Sefiras HaOmer. The simple count of days and weeks mandated by the Torah has accreted other prayers and psalms, mostly since the time of the Arizal, who largely reshaped many of our liturgical practices, introducing explicit kabbalah into the various nuscha'os. Most are psalms, but the prayer for correction of sefiros has long puzzled me. How do we correct these sefiros? What does correcting sefiros mean?

I recently purchased a terrific book that finally explains these issues: Us'fartem Lachem Ha-Shalem, by R' Daniel Frisch, author of the commentary, Matok Mi-Devash, on the Zoharic corpus.

First off, the whole system of 49 sefiros and 49 days fits nicely into the ancient practice of Jewish symbolism. Symbolism generally consists of finding correspondences among similar items, be they parallel (3 aliyos – Kohen Levi Yisrael – Avraham Yitzchak Yaakov – Torah Nevi’im Kesuvim...), or (more commonly) between an abstraction and a thing symbolized (Echod Mi Yodei’a is a good example). Both come into play here. Days correspond to sefiros, which abstract behavioral attributes.

49 days are 7x7 days, corresponding to the 7 lower, or
emotional, sefiros (Chessed Gevurah Tiferes Netzach Hod Yesod Malchus); the three upper ones, ([Kesser] Chochmah Binah [Daas]), reference intellectual qualities. Each day gets a pair of sefiros, one changing each week, the other changing each day of the week, in the same order. The seven sefiros also correspond to different body parts, and (Biblical figures) each of which has an attribute (Avraham is Chessed, Yaakov is Emes, etc.); the confluence of correspondences equates each sefiroh-pair to a personality attribute.

It is only through hard personal work that these attributes can be corrected. This period, between the Exodus, and the highest level of holiness at Matan Torah, facilitates that personal work.

These are the seven sefiros. R’ Frisch advises on Man/God relations, Man/Man, actions of the limbs, and actions relating to time – the person relating to G-d, to others, to himself in space and time. The attribute from Avos 6:6 on acquiring Torah also appears. Each recommendation is extensively footnoted to the Zohar and other Kabbalistic works.

He notes that this system developed a few generations after the Ariza"l. While the Ari recommended working on the seven attributes, the system of correspondences was developed (apparently) by siddur-printers. Note that the attributes are not Lurianic kavvanos, against which the Chida and the Minchas Elazar warn the masses.

We now take R’ Frisch’s advice for Shabbos, the 26th day of the Omer, Hod of Netzach, as a sample:

**Man/God:**

1. Thank G-d daily to establish Netzach the positive & negative mitzvot in one’s heart, as thanksgiving derives from Hod.

2. Work on conquering one’s yetzer, thanking G-d for renewing His help daily, enabling one to establish the mitzvos internally. Thus Hod in Netzach.

3. Recognize, and thank Him for His aid in decisionmaking, as advice comes from Netzach – thus Netzach through Hod.

**Man/Man:**

1. Help others to solidify their inclinations through hakaras hatov, as Netzach through Hod.

2. Thank groups, e.g. shul donors or marbitzei Torah, with plaques and dedications, inspiring more thanksgiving and establishment of life eternal.

3. Thank a friend for good advice.

**Space:**

Use the right leg while thanking someone for advice, or being makir tov (this should reinforce the consciousness of the corresponding attributes).

**Time:**

1. Thank G-d for these in the morning, especially if it is Wednesday (both Netzach).

2. Concentrate on the beracha Mekabetz Nidechei Amo Yisrael, re-establishing Israel.

3. Think on the name Elokim Tzevakos, and on Moshe Rabbienu if you read a verse with either in it.

**Kinyan Torah:**

Make a fence for Torah. * * *

Get this book, if you normally say the Yehi Ratzon for correcting the middos – it will give your Omer a whole new light.

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1 Arizal, Shaar Hakavonos, p. 42 sec. a. Unless otherwise stated, footnotes drawn from R’ Frisch’s book.

2 Based on Zohar Hadash Yisro 33b.

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**Sefirah** | **Body** | **Person** | **Attribute**
--- | --- | --- | ---
Chessed | R Arm | Avraham | Chessed
Gevurah | L Arm | Yitzchak | Pachad
Tiferes | Torso | Yaakov | Emes
Netzach | R Leg | Moshe | Permanence
Hod | L Leg | Aaron | Love, Thanks
Yesod | Groin | Yosef | Hospitality
Malchus | Mouth | David | Tzedakah

Each set of three sefiros create a dialectic: two opposites synthesized by the third. Chessed and Gevurah are synthesized in Tiferes, Netzach and Hod in Yesod, and all channel through Malchus, the mouth, in moving to lower levels.

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