

# מתוקים מדבש



## *Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*

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### Bemachashavah Techilah

**T**he *parashah* begins with the words: “*Emor el haKohanim*” (Vayikra 21:1). Normally, we find that when Hashem wants Moshe *Rabbeinu* to convey a message to the nation He says: “*Daber el Bnei Yisrael.*”<sup>1</sup> Why here is the language *amirah* instead of *dibbur*?

We know that *dibbur* is the language used to convey something forceful, while *amirah* is the language used to convey something gently. We thus find that Hashem, in giving us the Torah, said: “*Ko somar leBeis Ya'akov vesageid liBnei Yisrael*” (Shemos 19:3). As explained by *Chazal*, the language of *amirah* is used in regard to the women (*Beis Ya'akov*), as the *mitzvos* were to be conveyed to them in a gentle manner, while the language of *dibbur* was used in regard to the men, as the *mitzvos* were to be conveyed to them in a forceful manner.

We normally understand that the cause and effect sequence here is as follows: Since women are soft, one needs to be gentle with them, whereas men are strong, so one needs to be forceful with them.

It may well be, however, that the opposite is true. When Hashem told Moshe to speak to the women

in a gentle manner, He was telling Moshe that the nature that Torah and *Mitzvos* will instill in women will be a gentle one, while the selfsame Torah and *Mitzvos* will instill a forceful character in men.

There are indication in the

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words themselves as to their connotations: the Hebrew root DBR is evidently a derivative of DB - *dov*, a bear. *Chazal* in several places describe the Persians as bears, and one of the traits they ascribe to the Persians is: “*Ein lahem menuchah kedov*” – they, like a bear, have no rest. By contrast, the Hebrew root AMR is evidently a derivative of AM - *eim*, a womb, or a mother. The men are supposed to be in motion, preferably in the manner of: “*tzaddikim ein lahem menuchah*” – this type of activity requires a forceful, willful manner. The women, on the other hand, are to cultivate and develop – this type of activity requires a gentle, caring manner, much like a mother is gentle with her children.

The language with which the *Kohanim* are to be addressed is *amirah*. Again, the reason is to

instill in them a gentle and caring concern for the Jewish people whom they represent. It is also for that reason that they are not supposed to come into contact with corpses. As explained by the Izhbitzer Rebbe, this commandment is analogous to the command a king might give his chef not to attend funerals so that sadness should not mar his personality and seep into his food preparation. So too, *Kohanim* must always be *besimchah* so as to minister properly – both to Hashem, but more importantly (perhaps) to the Jews, whom they must serve and bless. *Simchah* is one component of the proper attitude; a gentle and caring concern is another.

We are all intended to be a *Mamleches Kohanim veGoy Kadosh*. As we have explained, the *Kohanim* part is the gentle and caring component. This is our *malchus* – our governance – not one of force, but one of concern for each other and the creation. On the other hand, our nationhood: *Vayihayu sham legoy, melamed shehayu metzuyanim* (from the *Haggadah*) – requires forcefulness and willfulness. *Goy az panim* (from the *Tochachah*) – to maintain the nation when *bechol dor vador omdim aleinu lechaloseinu* requires *azus* – but *azus dikedushah*, for the

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Vayikra 1:2, 4:2, 7:23, etc.

sake of Heaven and our national

destiny to represent Him on Earth.

“Speak to Aharon and to his sons and [tell them to] separate from the consecrated things of the Children of Israel” (Vayikra 22:2). With “terumah” and the portion of the offerings that belong to the *Kohanim* being their main source of sustenance, and the *Kohanim* being the segment of the nation designated to take care of whatever the nation donates to/for the Temple, the Torah cannot mean that the *Kohanim* (Aharon and his sons) should stay away from these things altogether. Rashi therefore tells us that the verse means “they should separate from the consecrated things (*kodashim*) during the days of their ritual impurity (*tumah*).” The very next verse bears this out: “Tell them (the *Kohanim*) that for all generations any of your descendants that come close to the consecrated things that the Children of Israel consecrate to G-d [while] his *tumah* is upon him, and that soul will be cut off from before Me, I am G-d.” With someone who is *tamei* coming in contact with *kodashim* being such a serious offense, we can understand why the *Kohanim* were warned to avoid doing so.

Nevertheless, it seems a bit strange that the first verse should imply that the *Kohanim* should separate from *kodashim* completely – without specifying that this only applies when they are *tamei*. Instead of two almost disconnected verses (the first commanding them to separate from *kodashim* and the second warning them not to have contact with *kodashim* while *tamei*), the Torah could have

spelled it out clearly, with a seemingly more natural flow: separate from *kodashim* when tamei because the consequences of contact in such a state are grave. Why did the Torah wait till the second verse

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to clarify when this separation is necessary?

Explaining the need for the *Kohanim* to separate from *kodashim*, the Sefornu writes, “so that they (the *Kohanim*) should not think that because of their high status the consecrated things of the nation are like regular things for them.” In other words, the Torah is trying to ensure that the *Kohanim* treat *kodashim* with the proper reverence. True, an outcome of treating *kodashim* the same as non-*kodashim* is an increased likelihood of contact with it while *tamei*; still, by not qualifying the mandated separation to be only when actually *tamei*, the Torah is telling the *Kohanim* to keep a certain (mental) distance at all times – not just when *tamei*. If they approach their everyday meals – which are usually *terumah* (and therefore have a level of holiness) – the same way we approach our non-*terumah* meals, they are not only degrading something holy, but are also in danger of (inadvertently) transferring *tumah* when they are *tamei* themselves. Creating a constant barrier – the hesitation before approaching *kodashim* – reminds them of its higher status and thus helps them avoid inappropriate contact.

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## Bakeish Shalom

This is true in many areas of religious life. Shabbos is not treated as just another day of the week, albeit with certain restrictions and obligations. Rather, the sanctity of *Shabbos* surrounds us; when we experience its holiness we need not be reminded to avoid prohibited activities – in “*Shabbos-mode*” it comes almost naturally. We refrain from all weekday activities, not just those technically forbidden. And if we unintentionally do something we know to be forbidden because we forgot it was Shabbos, we are required to bring a sin-offering. Not being in a “*Shabbos* frame of mind” can lead to “*chillul Shabbos*” just as not viewing *kodashim* as holy can lead to handling them while *tamei*. The goal is not to catch ourselves before violating the Sabbath, but to be enveloped by its holiness – its being separate from the rest of the days of the week – which will in turn help us avoid forbidden activities.

Similarly, it is much more difficult to talk in shul if we truly consider it a “House of G-d.” However, if we enter the sanctuary the same way we enter any other room or building, it becomes very difficult to act differently once we are inside. By maintaining the proper awe of holy space, we can much more easily maintain the proper decorum.

Having *terumah* for breakfast, lunch and supper does not take away from its holiness, so the *Kohanim* were commanded to “separate” from it at all times. Keeping *Shabbos* every week and davening in shul on a regular basis

should not diminish the special way

we treat them either.

“**Y**ou Are *Kadosh*, and Your Name Is *Kadosh*, and *kedoshim* praise You every day. Selah! [For you are G-d, King, Great and *Kadosh*. –*Sepharad*] *Baruch Atah ... the Kadosh G-d.*”

The question of *kedushah* is also central to the opening phrase of one of last week’s *parashiyos*. “*Kedoshim tihyu...* – Be *kadosh* for I Am *Kadosh*.”<sup>1</sup> But what is *kedushah*? Translating it as “sanctity” or “holiness” falls short as the meaning of the English words is not too clear, nor are we sure that they truly capture the connotations of the Hebrew original.

The Toras *Kohanim* on the *pasuk* writes “*kedoshim tihyu – perushim tihyu*, you shall be separated”. Along these lines the Ramban writes “make yourself *kadosh* with that which is permitted to you” by refraining from the permitted. It would seem that they are defining *kedushah* as separation.

However, Rav Shimon Shkop<sup>2</sup> notes that this definition fails for the clause – “for I am *kadosh*”. There is no purpose or meaning in Hashem restraining Himself.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps we could also note that the Ramban could not be defining *kedushah* since he uses the word “*kadosh*” in the definition. Rather, the Ramban is suggesting the way

in which to obey the *pasuk* and become *kadosh* to someone who already knows what *kadosh* is.

What we do know about Hashem is that He desires *leheitiv*, to bestow good upon others. The entire universe exists so that Hashem could have someone to receive His gift. Rav Shimon translates “*ki Kadosh Ani*” as “for I am fully committed to helping others.” The call to be *kadosh* is the call to live one’s life for the sake of bettering others. To be *kadosh* is to avoid that which serves no one but the person himself.

Returning to the recurring theme of the opening *berachos* of *Shemonah Esrei...*

If we turn to the phrase inserted in *nusach Sefarad*, we find *kedushah* associated with Hashem being King, and being *Gadol*, Great. These are both words that the Gra finds very significant in understanding the first *berachah*. Moshe’s praise, “*haKel haGadol haGibbor vahaNorah* – the G-d, the Great, the Mighty and the Awe Inspiring” finds reiterating development throughout that *berachah*. We therefore enter this *berachah* after having defined *Gadol* as “*gomeil chassadim tovim* – supports through good acts of kindness.” Hashem is Great because his Good fills all of creation. The total commitment to giving to others that Rav Shimon uses to define *kedushah*.

So, our *berachah* becomes, “You are committed to being *meitiv* others, and your reputation (*shimcha*) is that of being *meitiv* others, and people who do good to

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## Sefasai Tiftach

others praise you. Selah!” It is not simply that the class of people who are committed to working for others rather than being self-focused also praise Hashem. It is working for the betterment of others which itself is praise.

It is not coincidence that there are three clauses, and three iterations of the word “*Kadosh*” in the verse at the heart of *Kedushah* (Yishayahu 6:3). As we say in *UVa leTzion*, Targum Yonasan explains the *pasuk* as follows: “*Kadosh* in the heavens above, the home of His Presence; *Kadosh* on the earth, the product of His Might; *Kadosh* forever and ever is Hashem *Tzevakos* – the whole world is full of the Radiance of His Glory.” The “home of His Glory” is where Hashem is *Kadosh*. The earth, is where Hashem’s name, how people perceive him, is *Kadosh*. And the *kedoshim*, the people who allow others to experience Hashem’s good, fill the world with His Glory – their sanctity is his praise.

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<sup>1</sup> Vayikra 19:2

<sup>2</sup> Shaarei Yosheir, introduction

<sup>3</sup> For that matter, it is arguable that such *perishus* on Hashem’s part would mean the item in question would cease to exist!