

Parashat Kedoshim 5776, 2016:

Kedoshim T'hihyu: You Shall be Holy

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Rabbi Chiya, in *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 24:5, teaches us that our *parasha* was taught to the entire nation (*b'hakhal*) “since the majority of the Torah’s fundamental principles may be found therein.” In contrast, Rabbi Levi suggests a different reason as to why Parashat Kedoshim was stated *b'hakhal*, “Because the *Aseret Hadibrot* (The Ten Utterances) are contained therein.” He proves his contention by quoting verses in our *parasha* that correspond to the *Aseret Hadibrot* as found in *Sefer Shemot*, Parashat Yitro, chapter 20. One telling example will suffice: *Sefer Shemot* 20:2 contains the *mitzvah* of believing in the existence of Hashem: “*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*” (“I am the L-rd your G-d”). Our *parasha* has the very similar phrase of “*Ani Hashem Elokechem*” (*Sefer Vayikra* 19:2, “I am the L-rd your G-d”). The *Midrash* presents this parallelism on a commandment-by-commandment basis. While there are substantive grammatical and hence, exegetical differences between these two formulations, there is little doubt that this is a recapitulation of the Decalogue.

The repetition of these commandments in our *parasha* led the famous Spanish Bible commentator, Rabbi Yitzchak ben Yehuda Abravanel (1437-1508), known as “the Abarbanel,” to ask the following question:

What induced the Blessed One [G-d] to command Moshe to speak to the entire assemblage of the Jewish people and motivate them (*vayazhiram*) regarding the *Aseret Hadibrot*? They had already heard them at Mount Sinai and they were written on the Tablets of the Law. Moreover, they already knew them. [Therefore,] what was the purpose of their repetition?

His two-part answer is quite fascinating:

It is proper that the Holy One commanded Moshe to gather the entire assemblage of the Jewish people together, motivate them regarding all of these commandments, and remind them of the Ten Utterances and the essence of the commandments, since all of this was preparation for the enactment of the covenant [into which they entered] as found at the end of this *sefer*, in Parashat Bechukotai.

Next, the Abarbanel notes the difference in presentation of the *Aseret Hadibrot* in our *parasha* from that in Parashat Yitro. This difference allows him to analyze the fundamental purpose of *mitzvot* observance:

The order of the *Aseret Hadibrot* in our *parasha* is different than that found in Parashat Yitro. This was to explain to them [the Jews who heard our *parasha* in full assembly] that the Ten Utterances and the essential principles of the Torah are not to be followed because of the inherent logic found therein - as based upon the apprehension of our intellect. Rather, [they are to be followed] because the Holy One Blessed be He commanded us to walk in His ways (*lelech b'drachov*) and to cleave to Him (*u'ldavkah bo*). [Moreover, we are duty bound to do] all that is good and perfect – not because of any other reason or logical conclusion [but rather, simply because G-d commanded us to do so].

At this juncture, the Abarbanel asks a deeply insightful question regarding our *parasha*: “Why then, does the Torah write “*Kedoshim t’hihyu*?” (“You should be holy...?”) His answer reveals a penetrating and holistic understanding of the Torah: “One ought not to think that *kedoshim t’hihyu* refers solely to forbidden physical relations [as its juxtaposition to the presentation of these laws, as found at the conclusion of the preceding *parasha*, Parashat Acharei Mot, might seem to indicate]. Instead, this phrase refers to each of the [Ten] Utterances. [This means the Jewish people] should be holy and sanctify themselves in all matters... (Translation, brackets and emphasis my own)

In sum, the Abarbanel focuses upon three different ideas in his analysis of the phrase, “*kedoshim t’hihyu*” and the repetition of the *Aseret Hadibrot* in our *parasha*:

1. The repetition of the *Aseret Hadibrot* prepared the Jewish people to accept the covenant that was subsequently enacted in Parashat Bechukotai.
2. The order of the *Aseret Hadibrot* differs in our *parasha* from that found in Parashat Yitro in order to teach us that our intellect is not the arbiter of the efficacy of Hashem’s commandments. Instead, they stand on their own, as guiding lights on our journey toward

walking in His ways and cleaving to Him.

3. The phrase “*Kedoshim t’hihyu*” must be applied in the widest possible sense, since it refers to the entire Torah and our obligation to be sanctified by and through it.

The great Chasidic master, Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905), known as the “Sefat Emet” after the title of his monumental work of Torah exegesis, suggests a different reason as to why our *parasha* was stated before the entire Jewish people:

This comes to hint to us that as a result of unity amongst the Jewish people, we come to merit holiness. This is the meaning of [the verse in *Sefer Devarim* 23:15] “For the L-rd, your G-d, goes along in the midst of your camp...” [When will this be the case?] If your camp is a singular entity, complete, and united, [then Hashem will go along “in the midst of your camp.”] (Translation my own)

For the Sefat Emet, unity among our people (*achdut*) leads to holiness within our people. Unfortunately, in our generation, *achdut* is a fleeting goal. As such, we long for the time when we will be, once again, as we were at Mount Sinai when we first heard the *Aseret Hadibrot: Am echad, b’lev echad* (one people unified in body and innermost spirit). If we can recapture this feeling of love and devotion for our fellow Jews, simply because they are our fellow Jews, then we will once again fulfill the phrase “*Kedoshim t’hihyu*.” May this time come soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the *parasha*’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdbe718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis*,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik’s](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.