

Parashat Vayakel 5771, 2011:

Understanding “Kol Adat B’nai Yisrael”

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Dedicated to the sacred memory of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam and Sheva bat Sarah Rivka.

The beginning of our *parasha* contains two of the 14 times in the Torah wherein the phrase “*kol adat b’nai Yisrael*” (“the entire congregation of the Jewish people”) is found. It also has two of the three instances in which this expression is used in the context of a *tzivui* (command). In our *parasha*, *kol adat b’nai Yisrael* appears in both the introduction to the laws of Shabbat and the obligation to construct the Mishkan (portable desert sanctuary):

Moses called the whole community of the children of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: “These are the things that the L-rd commanded to make. Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have sanctity, a day of complete rest to the L-rd; whoever performs work thereon [on this day] shall be put to death. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.” (*Sefer Shemot* 35:1-3, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, underlining my own)

And Moses spoke to the entire community of the children of Israel, saying: This is the word that the L-rd has commanded to say... And every wise hearted person among you shall come and make everything that the L-rd has commanded: The Mishkan, its tent and its cover, its clasps and its planks, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets... (*Ibid.* , 4, 10-11)

The third use of this phrase as a command is found in Parashat Kedoshim. Therein, the Torah uses our expression as part of the mitzvah to live lives dedicated to holiness: “And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the entire congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd, your G-d, am holy.” (*Sefer Vayikra* 19:1-2)

If we follow the order of these Torah passages, we find that *kol adat b'nai Yisrael*, i.e. every man, woman, and child, was directly involved with the commanding of the mitzvot pertaining to Shabbat, the Mishkan, and the pursuit of *kedushah* (holiness). At this point we might well ask: “Why did Hashem quite literally present these three commandments to the entire nation, when other commandments were not introduced in this manner?” In my estimation, the Torah followed this approach because each one of these mitzvot teaches us an overarching principle as to how to live authentic Jewish lives: Shabbat embodies the notion of *kedushat ha'zeman* (the holiness of time), the Mishkan portrays the idea of *kedushat hamakom* (the holiness of place), and “*kedoshim t'hiyu*” (“You shall be holy”) represents *kedushat hagavra* (the holiness of person).

Kedushat ha'zeman, holiness of time, is a revolutionary concept that our people have shared with the world. It declares that time does not rule man. Yes, there are seconds, minutes, days, months, years, decades, and centuries. This, of course, is undeniable. The question is, however, “What do I do with all this time? Is it simply an empirical measure of my life or do I try to invest each possible moment of time with the spark of the Divine?” The message of the Shabbat day is that it can and should be different in kind and degree from all other days. After all, its 24 plus hours were sanctified by the Almighty from the earliest moments of Creation:

Now the heavens and the earth were completed and all their host. And G-d completed on the seventh day His work that He did, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work that He did. And G-d blessed the seventh day and He hallowed it, for thereon He abstained from all His work that G-d created to do. (*Sefer Bereishit* 2:1-3)

Thus, when the Jewish people join G-d by refraining from creative physical activity on Shabbat (*melacha*), we symbolically become His partner in *Maaseh Bereishit* (the

Creation of the World), and in sanctifying time itself. In a word, we declare that we are time's master and that it does not rule over us.

As noted above, the Mishkan represents *kedushat hamakom*, holiness of place. My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), distinguished between two kinds of holiness of place. The first is *kidsha l'sha'ata* (temporary holiness), and the second is *kidsha l'atid lavo* (permanent holiness). Prior examples of the use of these two concepts may be found in the Rambam's (1135-1204) *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Terumot* 1:5:

All of the land that our ancestors conquered as they came up from Egypt that became sanctified with the first act of sanctification (*kedushah rishonah*) lost its holiness when they were exiled [in 586 BCE]. This is so since this first act of sanctification was solely a result of military activity. Thus, its sanctification was only temporary holiness (*kidsha l'sha'ata*) rather than permanent holiness (*kidsha l'atid lavo*). When the exiles returned from Babylonia [approximately 540 BCE], however, and they settled in a portion of the land, they sanctified it with the second act of sanctification (*kedushah shniah*). This holiness remains in effect forever, both *kidsha l'sha'ata* and *kidsha l'atid lavo*. (Translation my own)

Rabbi Soloveitchik applied the ideas of *kidsha l'sha'ata* and *kidsha l'atid l'avo*, as well, to the Revelation at Mount Sinai and to the location of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple in Jerusalem). He noted that the actual moment of Revelation when Hashem spoke the words: "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*" ("I am the L-rd your G-d"), was one-sided in nature. This was the most magnificent and awe-filled moment that ever was or ever would be, for at this time Hashem declared His Divine Presence and issued His commandments in words that were heard worldwide, reverberating in our hearts and minds until today. Yet, the Jewish people were but submissive witnesses to the Revelation. We passively received the Torah - nothing less and nothing more. We were neither active nor creative in this encounter with our Creator. As a result, said Rabbi Soloveitchik, Mount Sinai was

endowed with *kidsha l'sha'ata*, rather than *kidsha l'atid lavo*. In addition, since it was holy solely during the short period of the Revelation, its very location was lost for all time. Thus, what happened at *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai) has always been our point of focus, rather than where it might be found on a map.

Our experience of the *Beit Hamikdash* was different in kind and degree from the Revelation at Mount Sinai. Rav Soloveitchik noted that the entire Temple service was a grand dialogue between man and G-d. We initiated this communication with our Creator via our freely given *korbanot* (offerings) and their accompanying prayers. We were active partners with Hashem, instead of the mere passive recipients we were at Mount Sinai. According to Rav Soloveitchik, this partnership is precisely what endowed the *Beit Hamikdash* with *kedushat hamakom* on the level of *kidsha l'atid lavo* (permanent holiness). As a result, even as the Holy Temple awaits its final and glorious rebuilding, its environs remain permanently holy. Unlike *Har Sinai*, we know exactly where the *Beit Hamikdash* was and where it will imminently be rebuilt, since its *kedushah* remains forever intact. Clearly, when man actively joins G-d in the sanctification of a place, its holiness is eternal.

Kedushat hagavra, holiness of the individual, is personified by the mitzvah, “*kedoshim t'hiyu*” (“You shall be holy”). This is a *mitzvah klallit* (a general commandment), since there is no individual action per se with which it is associated. This status led *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) into a variety of heated controversies as to how one ought to explain, and thereby fulfill, this commandment. It must be stressed that these discussions

were not merely academic in nature, since a clear understanding of this Divine obligation sets the stage for a life of genuine sanctity and existential meaning.

Chazal accepted the pursuit of pleasure as a natural part of the human psyche and, therefore, categorically rejected any and all notions of asceticism. At the same time, however, they stressed that all pleasure seeking activities must be controlled by both the intent and content of the Halacha (Jewish Law). The obligation to repudiate unfettered hedonism, and to pursue pleasure according to the dictates of the Torah, leads us toward *kedushah*. Moreover, if one truly desires to achieve the highest level of *kedushat hagavra*, all of his actions must be dedicated to serving Hashem. This concept was given powerful voice in *Sefer Arba'ah Turim*, Rabbeinu Yaakov ben Asher's (1269-1343) halachic *magnum opus*:

...and so, too, regarding all actions that are pleasurable in this world – each of them should be pursued in order to serve the Creator, may He be exalted. Thus, one's intention should never be for the mere satisfaction of his bodily needs and desires. As it is written: "Know Him in all your ways, and He will direct your paths." (*Sefer Mishle* 3:6) Our Sages also said: "And all of your actions should be directed toward Heaven." (*Pirkei Avot* 2:11) This was expressed, as well, by Rabbeinu Yonah [died 1263] in his commentary on *Pirkei Avot*: "... and may all of your actions be directed toward Heaven," – "Even those actions that are permissible (*reshut*) such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, standing, physical relations, speaking, and all other physical needs. All of the aforementioned should be directed to the service of your Creator or to something that enables you to serve Him." (*Orech Chaim* 231:1, translation my own)

May it be G-d's will and our heartfelt desire to live lives dedicated to the active recognition of, and rejoicing in, all periods of *kedushat ha'zeman*. May we do this, once again, as one united nation in Hashem's place of ultimate *kedushat hamakom* – the *Beit Hamikdash*. Then, too, may our lives embody the highest and most sublime understanding of *kedushat hagavra*. Then, we will once again achieve the status of *kol adat b'nai Yisrael. V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Past drashot may be found at my new website:

<http://reparashathashavuah.weebly.com/>

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 at rdbe718@gmail.com.