



FOCUSING ON PROPER GROWTH (PART 2)

כל עדת בני ישראל IS COMMANDED TO BE HOLY

In this week's *parshah*, it says וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל, "and Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: 'Speak to **all** of Bnei Yisroel...' (Vayikra 19:2). You have to know that this is a very rare introduction. There's דבר אל בני ישראל but דבר אל בני ישראל is very unique. Hashem wanted every single part of Klal Yisrael to be involved in this *parshah*. Rashi points out that for this *parshah* Klal Yisrael was commanded to come together and to hear directly what Moshe Rabeinu had to say. Other *parshiyos* they didn't hear directly from Moshe. Rashi says that the reason is שרוב גופי תורה תלויים בה, most of the great principles and fundamentals are mentioned in this *parshah*.

Now, after seeing that preface, the first *mitzvah* mentioned here appears to be a bit strange. The first *mitzvah* that's mentioned here is קדושים תהיו, "you shall be holy." Now, generally what does the word 'holy' mean? It means a *kodoshdike* person - someone who is dedicated to one purpose. Rashi himself elsewhere says clearly that it means מובדל ומופרש. A holy person is someone who is separate, who stands unique amongst mankind or amongst Klal Yisrael. When we say an individual is a *heilegeh* Yid, we mean to say that among Klal Yisrael, he stands above and beyond.

The Torah actually utilizes the term *kadosh* even when something is prohibited because it means it's separated from you. It doesn't always mean separated "up." It can mean separated "down."

But here, the Torah says that everybody, every man, every woman, every teenager has a *mitzvah* and a *tzivuy* to be *kadosh*. Why? The *passuk* goes on to say כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם, "because I, Hashem am *kadosh*." Hashem is definitely unique. Hashem is not superman. Hashem is in a class entirely of His own. He is *echad*. There is no one like Him in *metzius*. There is no one like Him in *hanhagah*. And Hashem says He wants us, Klal Yisrael, to be unique amongst mankind. That is amazing.

Now, obviously, if Hashem *tells* me to be unique, it's not that you are unique. Hashem told us we are a unique nation. We're His chosen nation. That's not a *mitzvah*. That's a fact. Hashem chose us as His nation. We are His *am segulah*. That's a tremendous gift that Hashem has given us. But Hashem told us, "I want you to be *kadosh*." That means naturally, we're not *kadosh*. Naturally, we're not different from anyone else. Hashem wants us to be *kadosh*.

WHAT DEFINES BEING HOLY?

Now, what is the *klal* of *kedushah*? How does a person manifest or exhibit *kedushah*? That's a *machlokes*. But I'm not getting into the specifics. How does *kedushah* by a human being look? What would you say? If it's not something that's natural, it's something you have to create yourself. What would you say is the *nekudah* of *kedushah*? The answer to the question is - and remember this - to control your otherwise natural conditions. Self-control is what *kedushah* is. Self-control is the *kedushah* of mankind.

If everybody is smoking and you're also smoking, you're not a *heilegeh* Yid in that area. If you are able to elevate yourself and demonstrate self-control, then you are a *heilegeh* Yid in that area. We have to know in what area Hashem is referring to when He tells me to control myself. But you have to understand what Hashem is saying is that a human being has the ability to control himself. Hashem empowered us. It's not natural. It's not a gift. The gift is the capability. We have the ability. Now, I might say this encompasses the whole Torah. You have the ability to control yourself and fulfill *taryag mitzvos*. That's not what it's referring to. It refers to specific areas. Self-control is the manifestation of *kedushah*. It's *prishus*.

AN IMPOSSIBLE COMPARISON

Now the *passuk* tells us: Be *kadosh*, control yourself, be separate, separate yourself from your natural urges that general mankind exhibits and runs after. And then it says, כי קדוש אני? *Chazal* (Vayikra Rabba 24:9) say, יכול, I would think, כמוני, that Hashem expects you to be like Himself. תלמוד לומר לא כי קדוש אני קדושתו למעלה מקדושתכם. My *kedushah* is greater than your *kedushah*.

This is a famous *Chazal* that really begs to be understood. What was the *hava mina*? How could *Chazal* suggest that Hashem expected human beings to be as *kadosh* as He is? How is that possible? This was a question that the Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (1902-1979), *zecher tzaddik levrachah*, would pose at many occasions. He would say, "Vus is de *hava mina*. What was the *hava mina*?" Could you expect a person to reach the *darga* of control and *kedushah* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself?! This is like wild stuff.

In תשל"ב the Mirrer Yeshivah added a wing to their building and they made a big ceremony for this occasion. And on that occasion Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz spoke and said over this *Chazal*. Sitting there was the Zhviller Rebbe. He was Rav Mordechai Goldman of Zhvil (1910-1981). He was a *heilegeh* Yid. He was a neighbor of the *yeshivah* and he came to this *chanukas habayis*. At the *chanukas habayis*, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz posed this question. Now, Rav Mordechai Zhviller was the *einekel* of the famous, holy, great *tzaddik* and *ba'al mofes* known as Rav Shlomke Zhviller (d. 1945). Rav Chaim said over this *kasha*. And then he turned to Rav Mordechai and said, "Clearly, a person who asks such a question doesn't know how great a man is. He does not fathom the greatness of a Yid and to what degree and what *madreigah* a human being could reach and attain." He said, "If the *passuk* would not tell me כי קדוש אני, that My *kedushah* is greater than yours, we would *taka* think that a person could reach the *madreigah* of *kedushah* of Hashem."

He turned to Rav Mordechai Zhviller and he said, "Zhviller Rebbe, someone who recognized and knew your *zeida*, Rav Shlomke, would never ask such a question, what's the *hava mina*, because your *zeida* was *aza heilegeh* Yid. He reached such levels of *kedushah*. It was just out of sight. Off the charts! But for regular people who don't know who Rav Shlomke Zhviller was," he said, "we have the *kasha*. What's the *hava mina*?"

So, what is the answer to this question? What's the explanation? What's *taka* the *hava mina*?

THE RAMCHAL DEFINES KEDUSHAH

The answer to this question is as follows. First, let's learn a short paragraph from the Ramchal's *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* (פרק כו). He says very fundamental principles over there. He writes: ענין הקדושה, what is the concept of *kedushah*? He says it is *kafel*, there are two parts to *kedushah*. Number one, he says, it's *techilaso - avodah*. To attain *kedushah*, to climb the mountain of *kedushah* it's *techilaso avodah*. It's work. But *vesofo - gemul*, at the end, there is a lot of good reward. The second part, he says, is *techilaso hishtadlus*, you've got to be *meshtadel* and *besofo matanah*. Then he explains what that means.

The Ramchal says, initially a person has to be *mekadesh* himself somewhat. The end is Hashem is *mekadesh* him. And that's what *Chazal* say (Yoma 39a): when a person is *mekadesh* himself *me'at*, a little, מקדשין אותו הרבה, they're *mekadesh* him a lot. When a person works on himself *milematah*, down below, here on this world, מקדשין אותו מלמעלה, they're *mekadesh* him from Above. The *hishtadlus* is that a person attempts to control himself, to separate himself from his natural drives, his natural urges, and tries to cling to Hashem. But, he says, you should know that the *emes* is - that's impossible for a person to do that. You know why? Because a person is a physical being and a person can't acquire this *middah* of *kedushah*, כי כבוד הוא ממנו, the *kedushah* that Hashem demands of me is too much. Because *sof sof* I'm a mortal, a *chumri*, a *gashmi*, a *baser vedam*.¹

Therefore, says Ramchal, I'm going to tell you something. *Sof hakedushah* is *matanah*. It's a *matanah*. It's a gift. The only thing a person is capable of doing is to learn self-control, pursue the true knowledge and continued connection to Hashem and awareness of Hashem. But you reach your capabilities and you can't do it anymore, and in the end, Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself will guide you and will lead you, and carry you across the finish line, בדרך שהוא חפץ ללכות בו, Hashem will place His *kedushah* on you and then you're going to be *matzliach* and you're going to be able ultimately to attach yourself to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Whatever the nature of a person prevents him from attaining, Hashem will give him as a present.

A MATANAH FROM SHAMAYIM

Now, you have to know that the *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* is not a *sefer* of exaggerations. Every word in that *sefer* is exact. After seeing the Ramchal's words we can understand what the *hava mina* was to think that a person is charged with having the *kedushah* of Hashem. Because *kedushah* is only something which a human being can begin the journey on. A human being cannot conclude the journey. The *hava mina* of *Chazal* was: If *kedushah* is something that a human being has to just undertake to do minimally - something which he's capable of doing, and at the end he receives it as a *matanah* from Hashem - so attaining *kedushah* is a *matanah* from *Shamayim*. Nu? If it's a *matanah* from *Shamayim*, is there any limit for Hashem's *matanah*?

So all the *hava mina* was that Hashem wants you to be a *chafetz* - to have desire, to reach the level of *kedushah* of the Ribono Shel Olam. That means, you should want it, you should do what you're capable of doing, and Hashem will grant you the *matnas Shamayim* to get there the rest of the way.

And *Chazal* are telling us, no! There is a limit to the *kedushah* that a man can attain. You have to be a *kadosh*. You have to rise above your natural urges. But there's a limit to the *matanah* of *kedushah* from Hashem.

So when we look at individuals, at people who seem to have acquired a sense of self-control of their urges, that's unbelievable, because naturally our urges control us. Our urges dictate to us what we should eat, how much we should eat, where we should go, when we should go, how much to sleep, where we should look, what negative behavior we should engage in. And Hashem says every single Jew is capable of attaining the gift of *kedushah*. But what is that gift? What is the gift of *kedushah*? The gift of *kedushah* is only granted after you've engaged in *peulos*, in actions to control yourself. Meaning to say, that *kedusha* doesn't mean reaching some level of holiness (as many may think), rather *kedusha* means engaging in the *peulos* of self-control, even to a small degree! Any single *peulah* that a human being engages in, is considered *moradige* in *Shamayim*. Any time a Yid is *kofeh* his *yetzer hara* the smallest *kefiah* is a huge achievement!

THE TA'ANIS HARA'AVID

The Ra'avid writes about a *ta'anis* that became known as the Ta'anis HaRa'avid. Many people see it and they say, "That's a *ta'anis*? That's not a *ta'anis*. A *ta'anis* is a *ta'anis*." Ta'anis HaRa'avid is that when you're eating a meal, leave over a little piece when you want to finish it. Not when you're full, not when you're stuffed, and it's disgusting to you. When you like that piece. You want to get that last *shtickel* steak. And then you leave it there. Of course, the *yetzer hara* tells you it's *bal tashchis*. It's not *bal tashchis*, because it has a wonderful purpose.

For a person to control his *yetzer hara*, to be *kofeh* his *yetzer hara*, is such an amazing thing, it even supersedes rules of the Torah.

There's a famous *gemara* in *Bava Metzia* (32b) that says, let's say you meet up with a friend, a fellow Jew whom you hate and he has an animal that needs assistance being loaded.² Then you have another friend, a *tzaddik*, a *yakar*, a *chaviv*, an *erliche*

¹ ענין הקדושה כפול הוא, דהיינו: תחלתו עבודה וסוף גמול, תחלתו השתדלות וסוף מתנה. והינו: שתחלתו הוא מה שהאדם מקדש עצמו, וסוף מה שמקדשים אותו, והוא מה שאמרנו ז"ל (יומא טא): אדם מקדש עצמו מעט מקדשים אותו הרבה. מלמטה מקדשים אותו מלמעלה, וכו'. ואמנם לפי שאי אפשר לאדם שישים הוא את עצמו במצב הזה כי כבוד הוא ממנו, כי סוף סוף חמרו הוא בשר ודם, על כן אמרתי שסוף הקדושה מתנה, כי מה שישלם האדם לעשות הוא ההשתדלות ברדיפת הידיעה האמתית והתמדת ההשקלה בקדושת המעשה, אך הסוף הוא שהקב"ה ידריכוהו בדרך הזה שהוא חפץ ללכת בה, וישרה עליו קדושתו ויקדשהו, ואז יציל בידו זה הדבר, שישלם להיות בדבקות הזה עמו ויתברך בתמידות. כי מה שהטבע מונע ממנו יעזרהו יעזרהו ויטור לו, ויטור לו שפאמר (תהלים פד:ב): לא ימנע טוב להליכים בתמים. ועל כן אמרו במאמר שזכרתי אדם מקדש עצמו מעט שהוא מה שישלם האדם לקנות בהשתדלותו, מקדשים אותו הרבה שהוא העזר שעוזר אותו ה' ויתברך וכמו שכתבנו. והנה האיש המתקדש בקדושת בוראו אפלו מעשיו הגשמיים חוזרים להיות עניני קדושה ממש, וסימני אכילת קדשים שהיא עצמה מצות עשה, ואמרנו ז"ל (פסחים טז ב): כהנים אוכלים ובעלים מתפריים. ונתראה עתה ההפרש שבין הטהור לקדוש: הטהור, מעשיו החמריים אינם לו אלא הכרחיים, והוא עצמו אינו מתכוון בהם אלא על צד ההכרח, ונמצא ששלם יד' זה יוצאים מסוג הרע שבחמריות ונשארים טהורים, אך לכלל קדושה לא באו, כי אלו היה אפשר בלתם, כבר היה יותר טוב. אך הקדוש הדבק תמיד לאלהיו, ונפשו מתהלכת בין המשפלות האמתיות באהבת בוראו ויראתו, הנה נחשב לו כאילו הוא מתהלך לפני ה' בארצות החיים עודנו פנה בעולם הזה. והנה איש כזה הוא עצמו נחשב כמשכן, כמקדש, וכמזבח, וכמאמר זכרונם לברכה (בראשית רבה מז:ח): ויעל מעליו אלהים (בראשית לה:ג). האבות הן הן המרכבה, וכן אמרו (רש"י בראשית לה:ג): הצדיקים הן הן המרכבה. כי השכינה שורה עליהם כמו שהיתה שורה במקדש. ומעתה המאכל שהם אוכלים הוא קרובן שעולה על גבי האשים, כי ודאי הוא שיהיה נחשב לעליו גדול אל אותם הדברים שהיו עולים על גבי המזבח כיון שהיו נקברים לפני השכינה, וכו'.
² תא שמע: אהב לפרוק ושואג לטעון - מצוה בשואג, כדי לכופ את יצרו. ואי סלקא דעתך צער בעלי חיים דאורייתא, הא עודיך ליה? אפילו הכי, כדי להפיק את יצרו עדיף.

Yid who has an animal that's *nebach* overburdened by his *sukkah*. He's got the *sukkah* on the back of that animal. It looks like it's about to collapse. There's a very big *mitzvah* to help your fellow man unload his animal. It's two *mitzvos*. Number one, you're sparing *tza'ar ba'alei chaim* and you're doing a *chessed* with your friend. So who would you say you have to help? The Torah says, you know who you should help? What's a bigger *mitzvah*, loading or unloading? Unloading. So you'd think here's a *tzaddik* who needs help unloading, so go ahead and help him. But the *gemara* says the opposite! It's true that if you have two friends, *talmidei chachamim*, you've got to help unload first. But if you see a *rasha*, a guy whom you saw do *aveiros* that rendered him legally to be a *rasha* and you're allowed to hate him, you have to go help him out first.

So the *gemara* says, how could it be? What's the *pshat*? You know what the *gemara* says? Because to do this you're accomplishing *kefiyas hayetzer*. You're breaking your *yetzer hara*. You're engaging in self-control. You're controlling your urges. Your natural urge is not to help this guy and you tell yourself helping the other person is a bigger *mitzvah* and it's a double *mitzvah*. The Torah says no. The fact that you're breaking your *yetzer hara*, that makes it the *mitzvah* that you have to do.

Anytime a person wants to do a physical thing, a simple thing, like eating pretzels - is it an *aveirah*? No. You say, "I'm going to have one less than I would like to have." You take a handful and you say, "Ah, that looks good!" You're thinking of the crunch, thinking of the salt. You start to salivate. You say, "Okay I'm going to be *frum*. I'm going to make a *brachah rishonah*. I'll make a *brachah achronah*." You start to *kler* do you have a *shiur* or not a *shiur*. You say, "You know what? Let me put back just one. Not for diet's sake and not for health's sake. Just to be *kofeh* my *yetzer hara*." You know what you just did? A tremendous accomplishment like you can't imagine!

DEVELOPING YOUR SELF-CONTROL

My *zeida* (Rav Avigdor Miller) was a man of tremendous self-control. From the time I knew him, as a young child, I never saw him eating *mezonos*. In his *shul*, there was a *kiddush*. He never partook of it. He didn't eat *mezonos*. I used to think that he didn't like *mezonos*. I once asked my mother, "Did your father not like cakes and cookies?" She said, "I remember when he was younger he used to come home for lunch and eat a large piece of cake and a cup of milk. That's what he liked having for lunch. At some point in time, he said 'no more *mezonos*.'" It's amazing. No more *mezonos*. The control that he had on himself was just not normal, in many, many areas. That's what made him a *kadosh*. I always wondered how he did it. He wasn't doing it with a *chaburah*. He was doing it by himself. But Hashem says: קדושים תהיו, and it comes from any self-control that you engage in.

Now, there are many people who have natures that almost defy self-control. There are certain people who are hyper and their hyper nature demands that when they want something, they have to have it. They can't control themselves. In people with tremendously addictive personalities, it's very common. They want something and they have to have it now. Now, there are some people who didn't have these strong urges but they developed them. They'll go five minutes to get a cigarette in the middle of the night because they have to have that cigarette. That's a very, very sick human being, obviously. Some people go for some candy, for pizza. You have to be aware of the fact that you have no self-control.

I've had people who became aware of how weak they were and it frightened them. They came to the realization that if they wanted to do something, there was nothing they would not do. That is frightening because we're all built with a lot of natural urges and they're not all *kosher lemehadrin*. Now when a person wants something, you know what he says? "I can't help myself. I just can't help myself." But it's not true. It means to say you didn't engage yet in any activity of self-control. Self-control in and of itself is a tremendous accomplishment. Because any time you control your *yetzer hara* you're being *kofeh* the *yetzer hara* and when you're *kofeh* your *yetzer hara* you're taking all the *ra* in the world, the whole source of the *yetzer hara* and you're weakening it.

When you do a *mitzvah*, you're not weakening the *koach hara* in the world. You're strengthening the *koach hatov* but the *koach hara* still remains. That's why Yosef is called the *tzaddik yesod olam*. Yosef's self-control was of such a magnitude that he *pashut* imbued in the world a tremendous *koach* for us to control ourselves. Now there are people who choose not to enjoy getting such a gift. They want what they want. They go down that path, *rachmana litzlan*.

A PRACTICAL EXERCISE IN SELF-CONTROL

Hakadosh Baruch Hu should help us. Hakadosh Baruch Hu should grant us the ability. I want to make a suggestion. Since this is a time of the year in which we're working on our *ruchniyus* and the *mitzvah* of קדושים תהיו applies to everybody, everyone should be *mekabel* one small thing that they're going to exhibit self-control on. Take a very small thing, like the pretzel example. Put back two pretzels. Take on something small. If you're going to have a few bowls of cereal say, "I'll take a little less." When you want to do something, everybody knows certain things, behaviors, that he wants to engage in, that is when you should say, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, I'm going to work on *kedushah*."

Now, when you work on self-control in one little area you will have the *koach* of self-control in all areas eventually. One of the things that I ask this *zman* is that people should stop smoking cigarettes. To stop smoking entirely?! *Chas veshalom*. That would be like asking for the *madreiga* of *yachol kamoni*; that would be already like Hakadosh Baruch Hu to reach such a *madreigah*. We never had such a *madreigah*. But at least the traditional cigarettes, people should stop smoking. Instead, take an e-cigarette, whatever you need, but apply self-control. Any *bachur* that came to the *yeshivah* and was able to control himself for thirty days demonstrated to me that he can change. Any *bachur* who could not keep himself for thirty days without smoking is a *mufkar*. He's a *beheimah*. He has no control over himself a *ki huzech klal*. He has no *shaychus* to the *gadlus ha'adam*. You know what he's saying? "It's only a smoke." In other areas the *yetzer hara* has you coming and going, twisted around his little finger - today, אמר לו כך, tomorrow, אמר לו כך. The fact alone that you feel you have to smoke is a reason you should run from it like you run from a snake because that means you're controlled by it and you are losing the ability to take control of yourself.

I don't mind whatever a guy does. He wants to enjoy himself once in a while, okay, but if you lose control then you're toast, because there's nothing that you want that you won't get. That means any *aveirah*, כל חטא וחטא. If I look at a *bachur* and I see he can't control himself for thirty days, I can tell you what areas and how many *aveiros* the guy is doing. He is *shakuah*.

Ai, he'll tell you, "In the last few days, I didn't do the *cheit*." In such a case, I say, "The *yetzer hara* is just preparing you for the next round. The *yetzer hara* is working on you. He's driving you. He's riding you. You're his surfboard, my friend. And every time, he creates a wave and you are his wave and he loves you because he rides on you like a *chamor*. Like Bilam rode his *chamor*, that's how the *yetzer hara* is riding you. And you're a real *gornisht*."

קדושים תהיו, exhibit some self-control, *rabbosai*. That's what it is. There were many *bachurim* who came and didn't smoke. I said, "Do you like music? For thirty days go without music." If they couldn't, that means they had no control. No control. If you have no control, it means you have no *shaychus* to anything about being an *adam*. That's the difference between an *adam* and *beheimah*. The *beheimah* has no ability to control itself and a human being does. So you have to exercise your *koach* of control. Then you have a *shaychus* to the *chelek Elokah mimal*, to the *kedushas Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that Hashem imbued us with and Hashem put in us.

The Ramchal said you have abilities that you don't know about. Even though your urges seem to counter that *kedushah*. Everybody tells me this one line: "Rabbi Brog, I have to tell you. I'm different. I was born with the *yetzer hara* on top of me." I said, "That's an *ofene passuk*. It says כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו. Why are you different from everybody else? You're a normal human being. The difference is you never controlled yourself. The *yetzer hara* owns you 100%. Turn it around. Start to get some self-control." Hakadosh Baruch Hu should help us.

✧ IN CONCLUSION ✧

Torah's command of קדושים תהיו instructs every person in Klal Yisroel to separate themselves from even something that, in principle, is not prohibited. We are commanded to be unique, to be *kadosh*, because our natural tendencies are not intrinsically different from any other nation. Hashem wants us to be *kadosh*, which means controlling our otherwise natural tendencies and urges that the rest of the world pursues. Self-control is the source of attaining *kedusha*, which in itself is also a tremendous gift from Hashem! Ultimately, however, no matter how much we try to practice self-control, we are all still physical beings, and as such, we can't come close to the level of, "*yachol kamoni*" being as *kadosh* as Hashem. Nevertheless, whatever level of *kedusha* we cannot possibly achieve by ourselves will be granted to us a *matanah* from Above - after we "do our part." *Kedusha*, therefore, is only granted after we engage in actions to control our urges and natural desires. Some examples of *kfiyas hayetzer* - the power that Yosef Hatzaddik brought down into the world that we can tap into - include leaving some food on our plate, helping someone with whom we have a complicated relationship, or even giving up certain foods or practices. Ultimately, these are all opportunities to practice self-control and come closer to fulfilling the mitzvah of קדושים תהיו. This coming week, I will, *bli neder*, attempt to follow some of these practices and say to myself while I am separating myself from them, "Hashem, I am abstaining from this practice to fulfill your command in the Torah of being holy. Please assist me in my endeavor, I cannot do it without Your help!"