

You Shall Be Holy

1. Midrash Tehillim 8:2

במתן תורה כשבא הקב"ה ליתן תורה לישראל התחילו המלאכים מדיינין ואומרים לפניו מה אנוש כי תזכרנו. ואמרו לפניו אישורך שתתן תורה בשמים למה שאנו קדושים ותורתך קדושה אנו טהורים ותורתך טהורה אנו חיים ותורתך חיים. אמר להם אינה ראויה להתקיים בכם... אמר הקב"ה למלאכים אין התורה מתקיימת בכם למה שאין ביניכם פריה ורביה לא מיתה ולא טומאה ולא חולי אלא כולכם קדושים. וכתוב בתורה (במדבר יט יד) אדם כי ימות באהל. (ויקרא יד ב) זאת תהיה תורת המצורע. (שם יב ב) אשה כי תזריע. (שם טו יט) ואשה כי תהיה זבה. וכן (שם יא ט) את זה תאכלו. וכל הדברים האלה אין ביניכם.

When the Lord came to give the Torah to Israel, the angels began to argue and said before Him, "What is man that you should remember him?" And they said before Him, "Let your Torah be given in the heavens, for we are holy and your Torah is holy; we are pure and your Torah is pure; we are living and your Torah is life." He said to them, "It is not fitting to be upheld in you... The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the angels, "The Torah cannot be fulfilled among you, for there is no procreation, death, impurity, or illness among you; rather, you are all holy." And it is written in the Torah (Numbers 19:14): "This is the law of a man who dies in a tent," (Leviticus 14:2) "This shall be the law of the leper," (Leviticus 12:2) "When a woman at childbirth," (Leviticus 15:25) "And if a woman has a discharge," and also (Leviticus 11:9) "These shall you eat," and all of these things are not among you.

2. Leviticus 19:1-22

וידבר יהוה אל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־כָּל־עַדְת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: אִישׁ אָמוּ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת־שִׁבְתִּי תִשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: אֶל־תִּפְנוּ אֶל־הַאֱלֹהִים וְאֱלֹהֵי מִסְכָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: וְכִי תִזְבְּחוּ זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה לַרְצֹנְכֶם תִּזְבְּחוּהוּ: בַּיּוֹם זִבְחֶכֶם יֹאכַל וּמִמְחַרְתּוֹ וְהַנּוֹתֵר עַד־יָוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בָאֵשׁ יִשְׂרָף: וְאִם הָאֵכָל יֹאכַל בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי פְּגוּל הוּא לֹא יִרְצָה: וְאֶכְלִיו עֹנָו יִשָּׂא כִּי־אֶת־קֹדֶשׁ יְהוָה חָלַל וְנִכְרַתָּה הַגֹּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מֵעַמִּיה: וּבְקִצְרְכֶם אֶת־קִצִּיר אֲרֻצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פָּאֵת שְׂדֶךְ לִקְצֹר וְלִקְט קִצְרֶךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט: וּבְרִמָּה לֹא תַעֲלִל וּפְרֹט פְּרִמָּה לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעַגִּי וּלְגֵר תַּעֲזֹב אִתָּם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: לֹא תִגְנְבוּ וְלֹא־תִכְחָשׂוּ וְלֹא־תִשְׁקְרוּ אִישׁ בְּעַמִּיתוֹ: וְלֹא־תִשָּׁבְעוּ בִשְׁמִי לַשָּׁקֵר וְחָלַלְתָּ אֶת־שֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה: לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂק אֶת־רֵעֶךָ וְלֹא תִגְזֹל לֹא־תִלְוֶינָה פְּעֻלַּת שֹׁכֵר אֶתְךָ עַד־בִּקְרָה: לֹא־תִקְלָל חֵרֶשׁ וְלִפְנֵי עוֹר לֹא תִתֵּן מְכָשָׁל וְגִרָתְךָ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה: לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ עוֹלָה בְּמִשְׁפַּט לֹא־תִשָּׂא פְּנֵי־דָל וְלֹא תִהְדָּר פְּנֵי גָדוֹל בְּצַדִּיק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ: לֹא־תִלְוֶינָה רֵכִיל בְּעַמִּיתְךָ לֹא תַעֲמִד עַל־דָּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה: לֹא־תִשָּׂא אֶת־שִׁבְעָתְךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ הֹכַח תִּוְלִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֲטָא: לֹא־תִקַּח וְלֹא־תִטַּח אֶת־תֹּטֶר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶת־בְּתוּלָתְךָ לְרֵעֶךָ כַּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה: אֶת־חֻקֵּי תִשְׁמְרוּ בְּהִמָּתָה לֹא־תִרְבִּיעַ כְּלָאִים שְׂדֶךְ לֹא־תִזְרַע כְּלָאִים וּבְגָד כְּלָאִים שֶׁעָטָנָה לֹא יַעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ: וְאִישׁ כִּי־יִשָּׁב אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ שִׁכְבַּת־זָרָע וְהוּא שִׁפְחָה גַחְרַפַּת לְאִישׁ וְהַפְדָּה לֹא נִפְדָּתָה אוֹ חֲפְשָׁה לֹא נִתְּוֶלָה בְּקִרְתָּ תִהְיֶה לֹא יִוָּמְתוּ כִּי־לֹא חֲפְשָׁה: וְהָבִיא אֶת־אִשְׁמוֹ לַיהוָה אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֵיל אֲשָׁם: וְכֹפֵר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן בְּאֵיל הָאֲשָׁם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַל־חֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא וְנִסְלַח לוֹ מִחֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא: {פ}

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy. You shall each revere your mother and your father, and keep My sabbaths: I the LORD am your God. Do not turn to idols or make

molten gods for yourselves: I the LORD am your God. When you sacrifice an offering of well-being to the LORD, sacrifice it so that it may be accepted on your behalf. It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it, or on the day following; but what is left by the third day must be consumed in fire. If it should be eaten on the third day, it is an offensive thing, it will not be acceptable.

And one who eats of it shall bear the guilt for having profaned what is sacred to the LORD; that person shall be cut off from kin. When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the LORD am your God. You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD. You shall not defraud your fellow [Israelite]. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the LORD. You shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kin fairly. Do not deal basely with members of your people. Do not profit by the blood of your fellow [Israelite]: I am the LORD. You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kin but incur no guilt on their account. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your fellow [Israelite] as yourself: I am the LORD. You shall observe My laws. You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material. If a man has carnal relations with a woman who is a slave and has been designated for another man, but has not been redeemed or given her freedom, there shall be an indemnity; they shall not, however, be put to death, since she has not been freed. But he must bring to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram of guilt offering. With the ram of guilt offering the priest shall make expiation for him before the LORD for the sin that he committed; and the sin that he committed will be forgiven him.

3. Jastrow Dictionary

קָדַשׁ: to be cut off, separated, to be/become pure, sacred, holy.

4. Sifra Kedoshim 1:1

"קדושים תהיו – פרושים תהיו."

"You shall be Holy": Separate yourselves.

5. Rashi, Leviticus 19:2

דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל. מלמד שנאמר פְּרָשָׁה זו בְּהִקְהֵל מִפְּנֵי שָׂרֵב גּוֹפֵי תוֹרָה תְּלוּיִין בָּהּ (ספרא):

SPEAK TO ALL THE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL — This (the addition of the words כל עדת) teaches us that this section was proclaimed in full assembly because most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah are dependent on it (contained in it) (Sifra).

קדושים תהיו. הווי פרושים מן העריות ומן העבירה, שפול מקום שאמה מוצא גדר ערוה אמה מוצא קדשה.

This means, separate from the forbidden sexual relations just mentioned and from sinful thoughts. Wherever you find in the Torah a command to fence yourself in against such relations you also find mention of "holiness."

6. Ramban, Leviticus 19:2

והענין כי התורה הזהירה בעריות ובמאכלים האסורים והתירה הביאה איש באשתו ואכילת הבשר והיין א"כ ימצא בעל התאוה מקום להיות שטוף בזמת אשתו או נשיו הרבות ולהיות בסובאי יין בזוללי בשר למו וידבר כרצונו בכל הנבלות שלא הזכר איסור זה בתורה **והנה יהיה נבל ברשות התורה**. לפיכך בא הכתוב אחרי שפרט האיסורים שאסר אותם לגמרי וצוה בדבר כללי שנהיה פרושים מן המותרות ימעט במשגל... ויקדש עצמו מן היין במיעוטו... וכן יפריש עצמו מן הטומאה... וגם ישמור פיו ולשונו מהתגאל ברבוי האכילה הגסה ומן הדבור הנמאס... וזה דרך התורה לפרוט ולכלול..

And the matter is [that] the Torah prohibited sexual transgressions and forbidden foods, and permitted sexual relations between husband and wife and the eating of meat and [the drinking of] wine. If so, a desirous person will find a place to be lecherous with his wife or his many wives, or to be among the guzzlers of wine and the gluttons of meat. He will speak as he pleases about all the vulgarities, the prohibition of which is not mentioned in the Torah. **And behold, he would be a scoundrel with the permission of the Torah.** Therefore, Scripture came, after it specified the prohibitions that it completely forbade, and commanded a more general [rule] - that we should be separated from [indulgence of] those things that are permissible: He should minimize sexual relations... And he should sanctify himself from wine by minimizing it... And so [too], he should separate himself from impurity... And he should also guard his mouth and his tongue from becoming defiled from the multitude of coarse food and from disgusting speech... And this is the way of the Torah to state the particulars and [then] the general rules.

7. Sarah Rudolph, "Parashat Achrei Mot – Kedoshim: How to be Holy" [Parashat Achrei Mot - Kedoshim: How to be Holy | My Jewish Learning](#)

Perhaps we can build on the idea of holiness as separate *from* with the idea of separation *for*. This can be seen in one of the Jewish terms for marriage: *kiddushin* – from the same Hebrew root as the name of this portion. The traditional formula recited under the marriage canopy is *harei at mekudesbet li* – "behold, you are sanctified *to* me." Sanctification here is not simply about separation *from* other potential partners, but about designation *for* a unique relationship with the specified individual.

8. Rabbi Nehemia Polen, "Touches of Intimacy: Leviticus, Sacred Space, Torah's Center" from *A New Hasidism: Roots*, edited by Rabbi Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse

I am advancing a convivial reading of Va-yikra, attempting to reclaim a book of benevolent openness and passionate, joyous life-affirmation. But what then of the key concept of *Kedushah*, "holiness," typically understood as "separation," often with a whiff of austere self-deprivation, repressive asceticism, and social isolation? Rather than "separation," I believe it is more accurate to think of *Kedushah* in terms of distinction. *Kedushah* entails marking of a particular domain—spatial, temporal, and/or social— as distinct, **focusing attention in order to positively affect the domains not so marked**. Thus it is closely linked with *Berakhab*, blessing....

Berakhab and *Kedushab* can be seen as twin aspects of the same process: *Kedushab*'s transformative energy is centripetal, facing inward, while *Berakhab*'s faces outward. One could not exist without the other. ***Kedushah* is not estrangement from the world, but engagement with it; the distinctiveness it calls for is to benefit those one serves and blesses.** The centripetal impulse is purposive: to clear and activate inner space so as to bestow positive influence; the going inward is in order to emerge empowered to give blessing. We have already encountered this alternation of *Kedushab* and *Berakhab* in narrative form, with the story of the entry of Moshe and Aaron together into the Ohel Mo'ed. This performative enactment of intimacy and moving to interiority, followed by emergence and facing the community in blessing, is the template for Leviticus as a whole.

9. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag, Studies in Parashat HaShavua [Kedoshim | The Header "Kol Adat Bnei Yisrael" | Yeshivat Har Etzion](#)

Kedusha - For a Purpose

...Sefer Vayikra's theme of **kedusha** in the three realms of **makom, zman, and adam...**

- a) **Kedushat HaMishkan** ["makom"], we explained, implies that God separates a special place and infuses it with an intense level of holiness **in order** that it affect and thus elevate the level of the area that surrounds it.
- b) In a similar manner, God separated Shabbat ["kedushat zman"], infusing it with an intense level of holiness, **in order** to elevate the spiritual level of the entire week.
- c) The same is true of **Kedushat Am Yisrael** ["kedushat adam"]. God separated a special nation, infusing it with an intense level of holiness, **in order** to elevate the spiritual level of all nations. God 'designates' Am Yisrael to follow the mitzvot of "**Kedoshim Tihyu**" to fulfill this purpose.

10. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Love is Not Enough <https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/acharei-mot/love-not-enough/>

At first glance these laws have nothing to do with one another: some are about conscience, some about politics and economics, and others about purity and taboo. Clearly, though, the Torah is telling us otherwise. They do have something in common. *They are all about order, limits, boundaries.* They are telling us that reality has a certain underlying structure whose integrity must be honoured. If you hate or take revenge you destroy relationships. If you commit injustice, you undermine the trust on which society depends. If you fail to respect the integrity of nature (different seeds, species, and so on), you take the first step down a path that ends in environmental disaster.

There is an order to the universe, part moral, part political, part ecological. When that order is violated, eventually there is chaos. When that order is observed and preserved, we become co-creators of the sacred harmony and integrated diversity that the Torah calls "holy."

Why then is it specifically in this chapter that the two great commands – love of the neighbour and the stranger – appear? The answer is profound and very far from obvious. *Because this is where love belongs – in an ordered universe...*

Clear rules and proper discipline help to establish, maintain and expand order for more fulfilled children, families, and society. Love is not enough. Relationships need rules.

11. Leviticus 10:8-11

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: יֵין וְשִׁכָּר אֶל־תִּשְׁתֵּה | אֲתָהּ | וּבְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ בְּבֹאֲכֶם אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלֹא תִמְתּוּ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: וְלִהְבִּדִיל בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַחֵל וּבֵין הַטְּמֵא וּבֵין הַטְּהוֹר: וְלִהוֹרֹת אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל־הַחֻקִּים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיהֶם בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה:

And God spoke to Aaron, saying: Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages, for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the impure and the pure; and you must teach the Israelites all the laws which God has imparted to them through Moses.

12. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Leviticus 19:5-8

It is most significant that the meal-of-peace offerings and the related laws concerning what to do with what is left over, and concerning the “rejected thing”; i.e. the prohibition against eating anything leftover on the third day, are discussed as the third fundamental law at the very outset of the chapter on holiness. This shows most clearly that in Judaism the sanctity of life is just as remote from a “mortification of the flesh” as it is from unrestrained self-abandonment to physical appetites...

“Meal-of-peace offerings:” The spiritualization and moralization of our spiritual pleasures, so that even the everyday table of our happy, joyous family life becomes an altar of God and we ourselves turn our eyes to God even when we eat – such is the blossom of the Jewish sanctification of personal life, which, in turn, if genuine, must immediately yield, as its fruit in communal life, the fulfillment of our duty to love our fellow men as our brothers...

13. Or Ha-Hayim, Leviticus 19:2

עוד ירצה על זה הדרך קדושים תהיו לשון עתיד פירוש אין הפסק למצוה זו.

We may also interpret the words קדושים תהיו by emphasizing the future tense, i.e. תהיו, "you shall become holy." The implication is that this is a commandment which is an **ongoing** process.

14. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Hidden Order of Intimacy: Reflections on the Book of Leviticus*

Kedushah can be understood as the aspiration toward such vitality. A kind of discomfort is its baseline: a restlessness about all given situations. Here, one is not yet who one wishes to be. One seeks out a deeper and larger way to be.