

Meshech Chochma

- Jacob Solomon

K'doshim

The later part of Parshat K'doshim contains the details of Torah-forbidden sexual and bestial relations, and their associated capital penalties. These are introduced with the words:

"You shall make yourselves holy, and you shall be holy. For I am the Lord your G-d" (20:7).

The Torah expands on how a person should make oneself holy, with:

"You shall observe My statutes... for I am G-d that makes you holy (20:8).

The connections between the verses seem to imply that one becomes holy by observing the statutes. A Torah statute, a CHOK, is a law that does not immediately appeal to human logic (c.f. Rashi to Bamidbar 19:2). Examples are the purification procedures with the ashes of the red heifer, the laws of kashrut, not wearing a garment made of wool and linen, and forbidden sexual relations that gratify the participants and appear at the moment of intense physical urge (though not afterwards) to do no harm to anyone else.

In other words, and as the Meshech Chochma emphasizes, by observing

the commandments, one becomes holy: "You shall observe My statutes... for I am G-d that makes you holy." It is G-d stating that He will bring those who observe the commandments closer to Him as long as they carry out the mitzvot, whether they understand their meanings or not.

But the Torah distinguishes between "G-d making you holy" (20:8), and "You shall make yourselves holy... for I am the Lord your G-d" (20:7). The Torah says what is needed for G-d to make you holy: that you should become holy. It does not say what is needed for you to make yourself holy.

This may be for the following reason. G-d knows people's struggles to find Him. He deliberately planned the world that way. If He was easy to find, people would not have freedom of choice. Indeed, finding G-d is life's work.

But a person has to make the first move. That means that in addition to keeping the commandments, he has to tune in to meeting the Almighty in this world.

How one "tunes in" varies from individual to individual. For that reason, the Torah does not say how. With Eliyahu, it was the KOL DEMAMA DAKA, the still, small voice

(Melachim Alef 19:13). With the generation of Mordechai and Esther, it was the story of Purim, realizing how a series of entirely disconnected events repeatedly coincided. The Hand of G-d was perceived, in the Jews being saved from Haman's plot.

The Torah indicates that you make yourself holy by allowing G-d to come into your life through observing the mitzvot. Live life, and when G-d knocks on the door, however subtly, let Him in...

And the character and 'sound' of that 'knock' varies from individual to individual. Your work, implies the verse, is to listen. Sh'ma Yisrael, Hear O Israel! And you make yourself holy in realizing that it is I, G-d, that is calling: "For I am the Lord your G-d".

And once a person has that degree of holiness, by being in tune with G-d, he will not find himself involved in those forbidden relationships. He will probably not even be tempted. This is because his or her degree of holiness does not fit in with these prohibitions: transgressing them would cause an unbearable and destructive degree of disharmony, cognitive dissonance, in living... e