

1.

Kedoshim

Prosaic Holiness

*Your Most Distant and Unholy Moment
Is G-d's Greatest Opportunity*



*Dedicated to Lee and Patti Shear in appreciation of their
friendship and partnership with JLI and their dedication to
bringing the light of Torah to communities across the globe*

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Kedoshim

The *parshah* of *Kedoshim* begins with the statement: “You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy.” This is followed by dozens of *mitzvot* (Divine commandments) through which the Jew sanctifies him- or herself and relates to the holiness of G-d.

These include: the prohibition against idolatry; the mitzvah of charity; the principle of equality before the

law; and the laws regarding Shabbat, sexual morality, honesty in business, honor and awe of one’s parents, and the sacredness of life.

Also in *Kedoshim* is the dictum, “Love your fellow as yourself,” which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called “a central principle of Torah,” and about which Hillel said, “This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary.”

INTRODUCTION

Questions for Discussion

Is there a way for us to feel close to G-d under such circumstances?

What advice would you give to someone in those circumstances?

I. FOR G-D OR FOR ME?

The Mystery of Three Years

TEXT 1

LEVITICUS 19:23-24

כג. וְכִי תָבֵאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ, וּנְטַעְתֶּם כָּל עֵץ מֵאֲכַל וְעִרְלֹתָם עֲרִלְתוּ אֶת
פְּרִיָו, שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים יִהְיֶה לָכֶם עֵרְלִים לֹא יֵאָכֵל.
כד. וּבִשְׁנָה הָרְבִיעִת, יִהְיֶה כָּל פְּרִיָו קֹדֶשׁ הַלְּוִלִים לָהּ.

23. When you come to the land and plant a fruit tree, block its fruit [from use]. It must be blocked for three years; it may not be eaten.

24. And in the fourth year, all its fruit will be holy; [bring it to Jerusalem in] praise to G-d.

Unhealthy versus Healthy

TEXT 2A

NACHMANIDES, AD LOC.

וטעם המצוה הזאת, לכבד את ה' מראשית כל תבואתנו, מפרי העץ ותבואת הכרם. ולא נאכל מהם עד שנביא כל פרי שנה אחת הלולים לה'.

והנה אין הפרי בתוך שלש שנים ראוי להקריבו לפני ה' הנכבד, לפי שהוא מועט, ואין האילן נותן בפריו טעם או ריח טוב בתוך שלש שנים, ורובן לא יוציאו פירות כלל עד השנה הרביעית. ולכך נמתין לכולן ולא נטעום מהם עד שנביא מן הנטע שנטענו כל פריו הראשון הטוב קודש לפני ה', ושם יאכלוהו ויהללו את שם ה' . . .

ואמת הדבר עוד, כי הפרי בתחילת נטיעת האילנות רב הלחות, דבק מאד, מזיק לגוף ואיננו טוב לאוכלה . . . והמאכלים הנאסרים בתורה הם רעים גם לגוף.

**Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman
(Nachmanides, Ramban)
1194–1270**

Scholar, philosopher, author, and physician. Nachmanides was born in Spain and served as leader of Iberian Jewry. In 1263, he was summoned by King James of Aragon to a public disputation with Pablo Cristiani, a Jewish apostate. Though Nachmanides was the clear victor of the debate, he had to flee Spain because of the resulting persecution. He moved to Israel and helped reestablish communal life in Jerusalem. He authored a classic commentary on the Pentateuch and a commentary on the Talmud.

The reason for this commandment is to honor G-d from the first of all our fruit, whether from a tree or a vine. We may not partake of them until we have brought one year's crop [to Jerusalem] as a praise to G-d.

However, the fruits of the first three years cannot be used as offerings to G-d because they are inferior in number, flavor, and fragrance. Many trees barely even produce until their fourth year. We therefore wait to partake of the fruit until we bring the crop the fourth year—the first superior crop—to Jerusalem, where it is eaten in praise of G-d. . . .

It is also true that the tree's initial crops are very moist and unhealthy for consumption. . . . For foods that the Torah prohibits are also unhealthy for the body.

*Sinful versus Not Sinful***TEXT 2B**RABBI MORDECHAI HAKOHEN, *SHACH AL HATORAH*, LEVITICUS 19:23

“וערלתם ערלתו את פריו” (ויקרא יט, כג). לא תעשה כמו שעשת אם העולם, שנאמר: “ותקח מפריו” (בראשית ג, ו) ולא המתינה ג’ שעות. כי בשעה תשיעית נצטווית - נשאר מהיום ג’ שעות. וכנגדם נצטווינו כאן שלא נאכל מהפירות ג’ שנים. וכנגד זה נאמר כאן ג’ “ערלות” - שלא המתינה שלש שעות. כי בעשירית סרה, ואלו היה ממתין ג’ שעות היה נכנס שבת, “והיה כל פריו קודש הילולים” (ויקרא יט, כד).

Rabbi Mordechai Hakohen of Safed 1523-1598

Kabbalist and Bible commentator. Rabbi Mordechai was a member of the illustrious circle of scholars and kabbalists in 16th-century Safed, Israel, before he was forced to flee to Aleppo, Syria. He is best known for his work *Siftei Kohen*, an allegorical and kabbalistic commentary on the Torah.

“Block its fruit [from use].” Do not do as the mother of the world, Eve, did, of whom it is written, “She took from its fruit” (Genesis 3:6) and did not wait three hours. The prohibition was delivered in the ninth hour, when there were only three hours left in the day.

Correspondingly, we were instructed to refrain from eating the fruit of a tree for three years, for Eve failed to wait three hours. She and Adam transgressed in the tenth hour of the day. Had they waited three hours, Shabbat would have begun, “and all its fruit would be holy; a praise to G-d” (Leviticus 19:24).

Paganism versus Monotheism

TEXT 2C

MAIMONIDES, *GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED* 3:37

שמו לחוק, שראשית פרי כל אילן שפריו נאכל יעשה בו כן. רצוני לומר, שיקריבו קצתו ויאכלו קצתו בבית עבודה זרה. ופרסמו גם כן שאי זה אילן שלא יעשה כן בראשית פרו ייבש האילן ההוא, או ישל פרו, או תמעט תבואתו, או תארע לו מכה . . .

ועמדה התורה כנגד זה הדעת, ואמר יתברך בשרפת כל מה שיוציא האילן העושה פרי לשלושת השנים. כי קצתם יתנו פרי אחר שנה, וקצתם יתנו תחילת תבואתם אחר שנתיים, וקצתם אחר שלוש - וזהו הרוב למי שיטע כדרך שבני אדם נוטעים.

ויעד לנו יתברך, אשר באבד זאת התבואה הראשונה והשחתתה - תרבה תבואת האילן, אמר: "להוסיף לכם תבואתו" (ויקרא יט, כב). וצוה באכילת נטע רבעי לפני ה', תחת שהיו אוכלים ערלה בבית עבודה זרה.

**Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon
(Maimonides, Rambam)
1135-1204**

Halachist, philosopher, author, and physician. Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain. After the conquest of Córdoba by the Almohads, he fled Spain and eventually settled in Cairo, Egypt. There, he became the leader of the Jewish community and served as court physician to the vizier of Egypt. He is most noted for authoring the *Mishneh Torah*, an encyclopedic arrangement of Jewish law; and for his philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*. His rulings on Jewish law are integral to the formation of Halachic consensus.

[The ancient pagan priests] ordained that the first crop of all trees that produce edible fruit be treated as such: A portion must be offered as a sacrifice to the gods, and a portion must be consumed in the pagan temple. They also declared that any fruit tree not treated this way would either die or lose its fruit, or its crop would be diminished, or it would be struck by disease.

. . . The Torah arose to counter this doctrine, and it instructed us to destroy all the produce of fruit trees for the first three years. This is because some trees bear their first crop after one year, some after two years, and others after three years. This is the nature of most trees that are grown by ordinary planting methods.

. . . G-d assured us that if we destroy the first three crops, the tree will produce plentifully, as it is written, "To increase for you its fruit" (Leviticus 19:25). G-d then instructed us to eat the

fruit of the fourth year [in Jerusalem] before G-d to counter the practice of eating the fruit in a pagan temple.

G-d Revealed versus G-d Concealed

TEXT 2D

RABBI YESHAYAHU HALEVI HOROWITZ, KEDOSHIM,
DERECH CHAYIM TOCHACHOT MUSAR, P. 345B

שלא לאכול פירות ערלה, שנאמר: "שלוש שנים יהיה לכם ערלים, לא יאכל" (ויקרא יט, כג).

טעם מצוה זו, לפי שכל השלוש שנים הראשונים כחות הטומאה שולטות באילן, ונקראו ערלים. והנהנה מהפירות הנולדים מהכח ההיא, כאילו נהנה מכח הטומאה הנקרא ערלה, כי הם חלקם וגורלם. וצריך להסירם ולגרשם מכרם ה' צבאות.

ואחר השלוש שנים חל על האילן קדושה וטהרה.

**Rabbi Yeshayahu
Halevi Horowitz
(Shalah)
1565-1630**

Kabbalist and author. Rabbi Horowitz was born in Prague and served as rabbi in several prominent Jewish communities, including Frankfurt am Main and his native Prague. After the passing of his wife in 1620, he moved to Israel. In Tiberias, he completed his *Shenei Luchot Haberit*, an encyclopedic compilation of Kabbalistic ideas. He is buried in Tiberias, next to Maimonides.

Do not eat blocked fruit, as the passage states, "It must be blocked for three years; it may not be eaten" (Leviticus 19:23).

This is because spiritual forces of impurity rule over the tree for the first three years of its life. Thus, the fruit is "blocked." Benefiting from fruit born of these impure energies is akin to benefiting from the "blocked" energies themselves, for the fruits are the portion and lot of these energies.

However, after three years, the tree becomes sacred and pure.

The Fifth Year

TEXT 3A

LEVITICUS 19:25

וּבִשְׁנָה הַחֲמִישִׁית תֹּאכְלוּ אֶת פְּרִי הַהוֹסֵף לָכֶם תְּבוּאָתוֹ, אֲנִי
ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

And in the fifth year, you may eat its fruit to increase its produce for you. I am G-d.

TEXT 3B

RASHI, AD LOC.

הַמְצָנָה הַזֹּאת שֶׁתִּשְׁמְרוּ, תִּהְיֶה לְהוֹסִיף לָכֶם תְּבוּאָתוֹ.

The [entire] purpose of observing this mitzvah is to increase the tree's fruit.

**Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki
(Rashi)**
1040–1105

Most noted biblical and Talmudic commentator. Born in Troyes, France, Rashi studied in the famed *yeshivot* of Mainz and Worms. His commentaries on the Pentateuch and the Talmud, which focus on the straightforward meaning of the text, appear in virtually every edition of the Talmud and Bible.

II. G-D'S SUSTENANCE

When G-d Descends

TEXT 4A

PSALMS 22:4

וְאַתָּה קָדוֹשׁ, יוֹשֵׁב תְהִלּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

And you are holy. You sit on the praises of Israel.

TEXT 4B

RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI, *LIKUTEI TORAH*, VAYIKRA, P. 29C

זהו פירוש הפסוק "ואתה קדוש יושב תהילות ישראל" (תהלים כב, ב). כלומר: שהוא יתברך מצד עצמו "קדוש" ומובדל. ושיהיה "יושב" ונמשך למטה, שההמשכה נקראת בשם ישיבה, כמו היושב שמשפיל קומתו, הוא על ידי "תהילות ישראל", שעל ידי ההילול והשבח גורמים הגילוי וההמשכה.

The passage "And you are holy. You sit on the praises of Israel" (Psalms 22:4) means that G-d is inherently sacred and transcendental.

To sit is a euphemism for descending from our natural height to a lower posture. G-d sits down. He allows Himself to descend, to be drawn into our lives and engage with us when we praise Him. Our praises and compliments stimulate His descent and cause Him to reveal Himself to us.

Psalms

Biblical book. The Book of Psalms contains 150 psalms expressing praise for G-d, faith in G-d, and laments over tragedies. The primary author of the psalms was King David, who lived in the 9th century BCE. Psalms also contains material from earlier figures. The feelings and circumstances expressed in the psalms resonate throughout the generations, and they have become an important part of communal and personal prayer.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (Alter Rebbe) 1745–1812

Chasidic rebbe, Halachic authority, and founder of the Chabad movement. The Alter Rebbe was born in Liozna, Belarus, and was among the principal students of the Magid of Mezeritch. His numerous works include the *Tanya*, an early classic containing the fundamentals of Chabad Chasidism; and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, an expanded and reworked code of Jewish law.

The Ascetic

TEXT 5

RABBI YOSEF YITZCHAK SCHNEERSOHN, *SEFER HAMAAMARIM YIDDISH*, PP. 139–140

די אידן זיצען אויף דער פרנסה וואס ה' יתברך גיט זיי. אויף וואס פאר
א פרנסה זיצט דער כביכול?

דאס זאגט אונז דוד המלך אין תהלים: "ואתה קדוש, יושב תהילות
ישראל" (תהלים כב, ב). און דו הייליגער, אויף וואס פאר א פרנסה
זיצט דו?

"יושב תהילות ישראל", דער כביכול זיצט אויף די אידישע לויבונגען.
וואס אידען לויבען אים, ברוך הוא, פאר דעם געזונט און פרנסה וואס
עה, ברוך הוא, גיט זיי.

און פאר די לויב ווערטער וואס אידען לויבען ה' יתברך, גיט ער ברוך
הוא בני חיי ומזוני רויחא.

**Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneersohn
(Rayatz, Friediker Rebbe,
Previous Rebbe)
1880–1950**

Chasidic rebbe, prolific writer, and Jewish activist. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the 6th leader of the Chabad movement, actively promoted Jewish religious practice in Soviet Russia and was arrested for these activities. After his release from prison and exile, he settled in Warsaw, Poland, from where he fled Nazi occupation and arrived in New York in 1940. Settling in Brooklyn, Rabbi Schneersohn worked to revitalize American Jewish life. His son-in-law Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson succeeded him as the leader of the Chabad movement.

The Jewish people sit—depend—on the sustenance provided by the blessed G-d. On what sustenance does G-d sit?

In Psalms, King David writes, "And You are holy. You sit on the praises of Israel" (Psalms 22:4). [King David is asking] You Holy One, what is the sustenance on which You sit?"

[The answer is] "on the praises of Israel." He sits, as it were, on the praises of the Jewish people when Jews praise Him for the health and sustenance that He provides for them.

And in reward for these praises, the blessed G-d provides us with children, life, and plentiful sustenance.

Prayer and Study

TEXT 6A

RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI, *LIKUTEI TORAH*, VAYIKRA, P. 40B

כמו הלחם, מזון גשמי, שעליו יחיה האדם - חיי גופו, הוא על ידי
שנבלע באבריו של אדם. כך התורה שנקראת מזון וחיים לנפש הרוחני,
צריכה היא שתבלע באברי נפשו, ושבה כבשרו ממש.
ועל ידי זה הנפש תשוב אל ה', לאשתאבא בגופא דמלכא, להיות נבלע
בגופא דמלכא ממש.

The human lives on physical bread. The sustenance of our bodies is secured when we digest and absorb food into our bodies. Similarly, the Torah is called life-nourishing food for the spiritual soul. We need to digest and absorb our Torah studies into our souls and feel it even in our flesh.

This binds our soul to G-d—to be attached to G-d and to be absorbed by G-d.

TEXT 6B

RABBI YESHAYAHU HALEVI HOROWITZ, *SHENI LUCHOT
HABERIT, TORAH SHEBICHTAV, TORAT KOHANIM, P. 338A*

ימצא דיבוק השכינה עם אומה הישראלית באמצעות הקרבנות
הנקרבים בבית מקדשו, כענין שתמצא הנפש השכלית עם הגוף על
ידי המזון שנזון בו.

The attachment of the Divine to the Jewish people is forged by the sacrifices that are offered in G-d's Holy Temple. This is akin to the joining of body and soul that is achieved by the food that nourishes us.

III. IN THE LOWLY WORLD

The First Commandment

TEXT 7A

GENESIS 2:16-17

וַיִּצְוֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים עַל הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר: מִכָּל עֵץ הַגֶּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל, וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת
טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ.

G-d instructed Adam, saying, “You may eat from any tree in the garden. [However] you may not eat from the Tree of Knowledge that has good and bad.”

TEXT 7B

MIDRASH, *TANCHUMA*, NASO 16

אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בֶּר נַחֲמָן: בְּשַׁעַה שֶׁבָרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת
הָעוֹלָם, נִתְאַוָּה שְׂיָהָא לוֹ דִּירָה בְּתַחְתּוּנִים כְּמוֹ שֵׁישׁ בְּעֵלְיוֹנִים.
בָּרָא אֶת הָאָדָם וְצִוָּה אוֹתוֹ וְאָמַר לוֹ: “מִכָּל עֵץ הַגֶּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל, וּמֵעֵץ
הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ” (בְּרֵאשִׁית ב, יז).

Rabbi Shmuel the son of Nachman taught, “From the moment that G-d created the world, He desired to be at home in the lower [physical] world as He is in the higher [spiritual] world.

“Therefore, He created Adam and instructed him, ‘You may eat from any tree in the garden. [However] you may not eat from the Tree of Knowledge that has good and bad’” (Genesis 2:16-17).

Tanchuma

A Midrashic work bearing the name of Rabbi Tanchuma, a 4th-century Talmudic sage quoted often in this work. “Midrash” is the designation of a particular genre of rabbinic literature usually forming a running commentary on specific books of the Bible. *Tanchuma* provides textual exegeses, expounds upon the biblical narrative, and develops and illustrates moral principles. *Tanchuma* is unique in that many of its sections commence with a Halachic discussion, which subsequently leads into nonhalachic teachings.

In the Throes of Temptation

TEXT 8

RABBI YOSEF YITZCHAK SCHNEERSOHN, *SEFER HAMAAMARIM YIDDISH*, PP. 140-141

די כוונה העליונה איז אז די עבודה פון מאכען גייסטיג, איידעל, די ערדישע וועלט, זאלען די אידען טאן די עבודה בכח עצמם, און די עבודה זאל זיי אנקומען שווער.

האט ה' יתברך אריינגעגעבען אין דעם מענטשען א יצר הרע וועלכער ווייזט דעם מענטשען די גוטסקייט פון דער ערדישער וועלט און ציהט זיין אויפמערקזאמקייט אויף די אלע קערפערליכע תאוות. וואס מיט דעם שטערט דער יצר הרע דעם מענטשען פון צו זיין ריכטיג איבערגעגעבען צו דער ריכטיקער כוונה צוליב וועלכער ה' יתברך האט באשאפען די וועלט, און די אידען, אין געגעבען אונז זיין תורה.

G-d's intention was to make it difficult for us to fulfill our [G-d-given] task of refining and spiritualizing the earthly world. He wants us to be tempted to sin and to overcome the temptation on our own strength.

This is why G-d gave us a natural propensity for the forbidden. This propensity highlights the benefits of the earthly world and draws us to its bodily pleasures. This disturbs our unwavering commitment to the purpose for which the blessed G-d created the world and the Jew, and for which He gave us His Torah.

The Fifth Year

TEXT 9

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON,
LIKUTEI SICHOT 7, PP. 137–138

על פי הנזכר לעיל וועט מען אויך פארשטיין ווי דער תכלית העילוי איז נאך ניט אין די פירות פון שנה הרביעית - וועלכע זיינען קודש און נאכלין לפנים מן החומה, נאר אין די פירות פון שנה החמישית הנאכלין בכל מקום ואפילו בטומאה.

דורך דעם וואס א איד ווייס, אז אפילו די פירות וועלכע זיינען ניט "קודש", אויך זיי זיינען תלוי בברכת ה' (ער זעט בעיני בשר דעם "להוסיף", די הוספה אין דער תבואה וואס דער אויבערשטער האט אים געגעבן), ובמילא לויבט ער זיכער דעם אויבערשטן אויף דעם - אט דער הלול לה', איז די "תהילות ישראל" וועלכע זיינען גורם דעם ו"אתה קדוש יושב", אז דער "ואתה" - וואס גייט אויף עצמות - "קדוש" ומובדל, איז "יושב" (ונמשך למטה) בדירה בתחתונים.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson 1902–1994

The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as "the Lubavitcher Rebbe," or simply as "the Rebbe." Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe's scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.

This helps us understand why we are not closest to G-d when eating the fruits of the fourth year, [despite the fact that] these sacred fruits are eaten in the sacred city of Jerusalem. Rather [we are holiest when eating] the fruits of the fifth year, which can be eaten anywhere, even in a state of impurity.

Seeing the increased bounty that G-d provides and knowing that these mundane fruits are products of G-d's blessing prompts us to praise G-d for them. This praise, "the praise of Israel," results in "You are holy. You sit." "You" is a reference to G-d's very essence—sacred and transcendent. Yet, He sits—descends into the home that we carve out for Him in this lowly world.

KEY POINTS

- » The spiritual moments of life feel holy and close to G-d. The prosaic routines of life don't.
- » In truth, the prosaic routine moments can be the holiest. When we overcome temptation and behave as G-d wishes, we are closest to G-d, though it doesn't feel that way.
- » The sacred, uplifting moments nourish our souls. The challenging moments serve G-d's goal of making a home for Him in the lowliness of this earthly world.
- » The home for G-d can only be built when we are beset by temptations in this lowly world. When we overcome them, G-d rejoices and is closest to us.
- » The spiritual moments also play a role. They fortify us for the challenge in the trenches. They help us win the fight to overcome the allure of sin.

