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NOT SO SPLENDID ISOLATION

Chazal tell us that the mitzvah of קדושים תהי was said at a gathering of all Klal Yisrael. Perhaps one can suggest that the significance of this context, is to explain the environment as a factor in the performance of this Mitzvah.

The Sifri has an enigmatic comment, about which, much has been written;

יכול כמוני ת"ל קדושתו למעלה מקדושתכם
"כי קדוש אני"

I might have thought like Me? (So, it explains) For I am Holy, My Holiness is loftier than yours."

There seems to have been a serious suggestion that we have a capacity, and thus an imperative, to achieve a level of holiness to match that of Hashem, were it not for the disclaimer 'for I am Holy'.

To understand this, perhaps a brief discussion of the nature of *Kedusha* is in order.

R' Shimon Shkop ז"ל, in his introduction to his monumental work *Sha'arei Yosher*, uses this Midrash as a basis to propose a different definition of *kedusha*. In a word, R' Shimon equates *kedusha* with selflessness. Just as Hashem acts as creator not for his own ends, but simply for the sake of the world, so too, we must dedicate ourselves to acting for the sake of others rather than our own needs.

But why then is mankind endowed with such strong feelings of self-love and ego? *Rotzeh adam b'kav she'lo yoseim tisha kabin shel chavairo!* R' Shimon answers that this trait of self-love is also a necessary ingredient for achieving *kedusha*. A small person's self-love will focus only on their selfish needs. However, a great person identifies with the community

and the world. They attain self-fulfilment through the betterment of others. The needs of others become their personal needs and agenda, motivating them to do great deeds on behalf of others.

(This is the real meaning of Hillel's astonishing assertion – 'that which you would not like to be done to you, don't do to others' this is **all** of Torah, everything else being mere commentary!)

It is this idea of *kedusha* as selflessness which the Midrash is addressing. As much as one strives for this 'Hashem-like' level of *kedusha* in selflessly serving the needs of others, by virtue of one's humanity there will always remain a tinge of selfishness, a '*lo lishma*' that is unavoidable.

Kedusha in R' Shimon's lexicon is not a synonym for withdrawal from the world. Quite the contrary. *Kedusha* demands that we engage in supporting others in their quest for self-betterment, and in the process, we achieve self-perfection as well.

Rashi defines *kedusha* as separation from *arayos*, thus connecting the opening of Parshas *Kedoshim* with the end of *Acharei Mos*. The Ramban disagrees, and takes a broader view of *kedusha*, defining it as avoiding conspicuous consumption, hedonism and indulgence in favour of the pursuit of spirituality. His famed formulation of the 'Glatt Kosher degenerate' speaks so eloquently to our infatuation with ever-more profligate ways to spend our money and still feel oh-so-frum.

We can now propose that while there exists an obligation on every individual to try to infuse their life with *kedusha*, the Torah here is teaching that this mitzvah can

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only be fully achieved within the context of community – it is a חובת היחיד that must be done בציבור. The initial assumption of the *Toras Kohanim*, "yachol kamoni," means to suggest that one might have thought that one can achieve *kedusha* by living in isolation; to which the response is an emphatic 'no!'. The path to *kedusha* lies through interaction with the community, growing with them, feeding off their energy, and contributing back to their growth and improvement.

This is summed up most poignantly in the following paragraph from R Tzadok Hakohen in his sefer devoted to the understanding of our holiness - (ישראל קדושים ז:) by way of an explanation for the attribution of Aharon Hakohen as the exemplar of Holiness – his singular ability to combine the lofty elevation needed to enter the *Kodesh Hakodoshim* seamlessly integrated with an intense empathy and compassion for the welfare of every Jew -

"*V'heyisem li kedoshim [ki kadosh ani] – mah ani kadosh, af atem...*" (*Toras Kohanim*) obligates one to strive to achieve the greatest heights of *kedusha*, comparable to Hashem's *kedusha*, as much as human effort allows. Through these efforts Hashem will, in turn, reciprocate with *kedusha*, separating us from all impurity and evil so they hold no power or sway, and no nation or people will be able to rule over us... **The dominion of other nations is caused by an erosion of the recognition of that singular sense of kedusha.** Therefore, when Aharon died and the *Ananei haKavod* disappeared, the King of Arad attacked and took captives, because Aharon was the קדוש הקדשים, embodying the greatest revelation of *kedusha* possible in this world.

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