

This Week In Torah *Acharei Mot-Kiddushim*

In Jewish meditation techniques, there is one verse from the Psalms which becomes the *mantra* upon all others are built. Psalm 16:8—*Shiviti Adonai l'negdi tamid*—"I should put the Eternal always before me..." summarizes what our aspirations should be as we pursue holiness in our daily lives. That is right—being holy is a MINDSET; a quest of sorts. Thus, the opening verses of Leviticus 19 [known as the Holiness Code] is the road-map for us to travel to get there. While God should be before us as the treasure we seek in righteous living, we must admit that our spiritual journey requires us to travel with others. Unlike monastic orders which solidarity is an asset in spiritual pursuit, we Jews need others to be a "tour-guide" of sorts. For us, holiness is a mindset that requires community to bring us in a solid, sacred relationship with God.

But be careful--- don't let the interpersonal desires overshadow the support offered by community members. RaSHI wrote that the Holiness Code comes after the sexual *ariyot*/transgressions and forbidden marriages. The first step toward holiness, he believed, was to be mindful of our sexual relationships. That mindset was essential for turning selfish acts of lust toward a better directed sense of service to others and indeed to God. In Kabbalah, lustfulness turned into a positive direction which is the essence of creativity and ingenuity which helps a community thrive!

19th century German Rabbi Raphael Samson Hirsch built on this by noting that holiness created was something we all must aspire to achieve. Noting the mission mapped out by God in Exodus 19:6, we are destined to be a kingdom of priests and a light unto the nations for moral and ethical behavior. Rabbi Hirsch defined holiness as occurring "when a morally free human being has complete dominion over one's own energies and inclinations and temptations... holiness is achieved when those are placed at the service of God's will." He added that holiness is not found when one raises to the level of his neighbor's behavior, but in relationships with others that recognizes the divine potential and latent divinity in the self as well as others. Others. 20th century Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel added that "Judaism is an attempt to prove that in order to be a man,

that in order to be a people, you have to be more than a people. Israel was made to be a holy people.” Hirsch and Heschel both acknowledged the power of cognitive recognition and choice in fulfilling that destiny. The Psalmist’s words echo that: *Shiviti Adonai l’negdi tamid*—“I should put the Eternal always before me...”

As we read the opening verses of the Holiness code, we can see them as a blueprint to what Rabbis Hirsch and Heschel established as our destiny. The verses speak of reverence [emulating what we should do for God by the way we treat our parents]; holding firm to our values [by the way we observe/guard the Sabbath]; keeping God forefront in our eyes [by avoiding idolatry]; and respecting God’s commands [by being conscious and mindful of what our ancestors did with their sacrifices—and what we do with divine gifts bestowed unto us].

Shiviti Adonai l’negdi tamid—“I should put the Eternal always before me...” – to get there, let’s follow the plan established in Torah that encourages us to ascend to be a holy!!