

Moshe Rabbeinu spends his final days reviewing and reinforcing the ideas and perspectives necessary to allow the nation of Israel to become a successful, powerful, and strong people. He reminds them to avoid the temptations of idolatry and immorality and to remain true to the tenets of our Torah and relationship with God. Moshe also dispensed a healthy dose of *chizuk* (positive reinforcement).

*“For you are a holy people to the Lord, your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a treasured people for Him, out of all the nations that are upon the earth.” (Devorim 14:2)*

God loves us. Not only when we behave or follow His dictates; He loves us all the time. Moshe tells us that failure is inevitable, but he also reminds us that God’s love and commitment to us is constant. God does punish, and there are repercussions for our negative or sinful behaviors, but the Divine love is always present (even if at times it cannot be felt). It is this message which gives us the strength to rebuild in the aftermath of communal and national failure. God forgives, and God loves. Why? Because we are the chosen treasure of our Father Above.

Rashi (Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105) advances a simple yet profound insight:

***For you are a holy people:*** *Your holiness stems from your forefathers, and, moreover, “the Lord has chosen you.” - [Sifrei]*

Moshe is not simply telling us we are holy; he is explaining that our holiness is innate. Our personal holiness doesn’t only stem from what we do or the choices we make; it is the result of who we are. We are the children of Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov, Rachel, and Leah. We are the descendants of Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech. Holiness is contained in our very lifeblood and embedded in our DNA. Moshe Rabbeinu was teaching us that no matter how profoundly we fail or how far we fall, we are still holy. No matter how many times we sin or how many bad choices we make, we are still holy. But how can this be? Haven’t we divested ourselves of our personal holiness? *“For you are a holy people, your holiness stems from your forefathers.”* There is earned, personal holiness and conferred, national holiness. Earned holiness is the result of our good deeds and positive accomplishments. It is attained through positive actions, but it can be lost through negative or sinful behavior. Conferred holiness is the result of who we are as the Jewish Nation. We are part of a people that is endowed with an irrevocable holiness. Conferred holiness cannot be lost or even compromised. No matter what we do, no matter how badly we mess up, we are still holy. This was the ultimate *chizuk* and message of hope Moshe was giving to his beloved flock. *“My dear children, you are holy and will always be holy. Even when you fail, you are holy. Even when you fall, you are holy. It is this holiness that God sees in you, and it is this holiness with which create the unbreakable bond of love between your Creator and you.”*

This Shabbos is Shabbos Mevarchim Elul. This last month of the year provides us with the opportunity for reflection and introspection. It is during these upcoming days that we ponder our accomplishments and failures of the past year and think about what we want to accomplish and who we want to be in the year to come. All too often, we feel overwhelmingly saddened by our failures and shortcomings. At times, we feel frustrated as the things we resolved to fix this past year are still in a state of disrepair. It is during this sacred, last month of the year that we must remember, we are holy. No matter how many failures we encounter or how far we may have fallen, we are still holy. We can squander our personal holiness, but we are always blanketed by our conferred national holiness. Where there is holiness, there is hope, and where there is hope, there are untold possibilities. (Reprinted from 5781)