

Holiness

Summary of portion

- Moses appoints his own brother High Priest, and his own cousin Chief Levite.
- Korach, a Levite, wanted that position.
- For this and other reasons, Korach assembles 250 distinguished leaders of Israel, and together they confront Moses and Aaron, saying, "You take too much upon yourselves. All of us here are holy, and God is among us. So why do raise yourselves above everyone else?"
- Moses attempts conciliation, but fails.
- God has the earth swallow up Korach and his 250 immediate followers, and follows up with a plague that kills 14,700 more followers at large.

Definition of holiness

Korach's prime argument centers on Kedushah (Holiness): All of us here are holy, and God is among us. What does it mean?

- The Torah does not define kedushah (holiness). Yet
 - We make kiddush on the wine
 - We recite the kaddish and the kedushah
 - We marry through kiddushin

Commentator: We behave as if we understand the concept of being kadosh (holy) which is present in each of these actions. But kadosh is a divine concept, and therefore, like the concept of God, is above human comprehension.

The Torah describes Israel as a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation." (*mamlechet kohanim vegoy kadosh*). [Ex 19:6]

In Parshat Kedoshim, God says: *Kedoshim tihyu ki kadosh ani, Adonai elohechem*. You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy. [Lev 19:2]

What follows is the Code of Holiness, a long series of disparate do's and don'ts (no sex with certain entities, not putting a stumbling block before the blind, not gossiping, Shabbat, shaatnez, etc.). .

- Not enough to give us a definition.

- Does it mean that commandments not in Code of Holiness do not make us holy? (E.g., kashrut, coveting, circumcision, being fruitful, holidays, sacrifices and Temple, tithing, etc)

Google: 13,600,000 returns for holiness, including side ad:
"Looking for holiness? Find it at ebay.com."

Dictionary: Holiness is

- The state of being set apart for the service of God. Usually ascribed to people, but can be ascribed to objects, times, or places.

- Something associated with a divine power.

Encyclopedia Judaica:

- Kadesh means "distinguished, set apart"

- That which is suffused with a numinous quality, both majestic and fearsome

- Holiness expresses the very nature of God

- Moral perfection is an essential aspect of holiness

- Holiness in Torah shares this with ancient Near Eastern religions:

 - Mortal danger involved in unauthorized contact with the sacred

 - Various degrees of holiness [ex.:

 - The Land of Israel is more holy than all other lands;

 - the most holy city in the Land is Yerushalayim;

 - the holiest part of Yerushalayim is the Temple Mount;

 - the holiest part of the Temple is the Holy of Holies;

 - the holiest place in the Holy of Holies is the point centered above the Ark, between the Kruvim, from which emanates the Voice of God.]

 - The contagious, communicable character of the sacred

Other:

- Holiness is the elevation of the human being from his animal nature to his being created in the image of God.

- Being holy = Imitating God (Imitatio Dei)

-The Midrash explains, "Just as God is gracious and merciful, so you too should be gracious and merciful" [Mekhilta, Canticles, 3]

Holiness means no excess?

Rashi:

You shall be holy" means You should keep distant from sin and licentious behavior. The Torah prohibits certain sexual behaviors, and prohibits certain foods and drinks. But it permits sex between husband and wife, and the consumption of kosher meat and wine. This might allow a person to act licentiously with his wife and be a glutton for meat and drink, and use vulgar language as his heart desires. The Torah does not forbid any of these things, and he would be allowed to be a vile, disgusting person with the Torah's permission.

So: "Holiness" means "Restrain yourself with what is permitted"?

-A holy person is one who is not self-indulgent?

Commentator:

Why should self-indulgence be related to a lack of holiness? This does not appear to be a "holiness" problem. This seems to be a problem of one who is not nice to his fellow man.

The answer is because a person who is not holy is self-indulgent. Eventually, self-indulgence affects not only one's relationship with God, but one's relationship with his fellow man as well. If a person is self-indulgent, he is focused on "My needs must be gratified". This is the opposite of a holy person. Someone, who must always satisfy his needs and his appetites, will eventually not be a nice person to his fellow man.

Ramban disagrees:

"You shall be holy..." means: Just as I separate myself, so you should separate yourselves. In my opinion, the separation being discussed here is not to separate oneself from licentious behavior, as Rashi maintains, but rather to separate oneself as described in the Talmud [follow mitzvot scrupulously?]. The rabbis are always referred to as "Prushim" [Pharisees], those who separate themselves.

Holiness means no distractions?

-Torah:

And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord [am] holy, and have severed you from [other] people, that ye should be mine. [Lev 20:26]

-Rashi explains:

If you separate yourselves from the other peoples, then you will be mine.

Similarly, a man draws a woman close through kiddushin, a process which forbids her to all other suitors [Kiddushin 2b]

-Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal) defines kedushah as a state in which a person becomes so fully united with God that all else is irrelevant. It is the state described by David HaMelech, "My soul clings to You." [Ps 69:3] We must avoid all distractions. (Shabbat?)

Achieving kedushah seems to be a two-step process, however. Ramchal explains:

Its beginning is labor and its end reward; its beginning is exertion and its end a gift. It begins with one sanctifying himself and ends with his being sanctified.[Messilat Yesharim, chapter 26]

Holiness means the priestly system?

Jewish tradition conceives 'holiness' (from the Hebrew root qds) in various ways, but most distinctive and central to the Torah is the priestly system, legislation for which comprises the majority of the law delivered at Sinai. It essentially involves the division of time and space into the spheres of the divine and the common. The word used in Leviticus for this separation, *hivdil*, is that used for the process of Creation in Genesis. Creation is a matter of proper ordering, which involves not only land and water, light and darkness, but also holy and profane, clean and unclean. It is the role of the priesthood, and Israel as God's priestly nation, to maintain this order in accordance with the guidelines set out at Sinai. The safety and stability of each individual, the nation, and ultimately the whole world, depends on it.

-But Korach said ALL of us are holy

-And God said: [ALL OF] you shall be holy

The division seems to be understood as a gradual one, with different behaviour appropriate to the merely 'holy' and the 'most holy'. The Mishnah therefore lists concentric circles of holiness: Holy of Holies; sanctuary; vestibule; court of priests; court of Israelites; court of women; temple mount; Jerusalem walls; all the walled cities of Israel; and the borders of the holy land. Distinctions are made as to who and what are permitted in each area. Likewise the calendar is divided so that the eve of the Sabbath to the end of the day is holy time, and certain feasts, such as the Day of Atonement, are most holy. Both holy time and holy space are rooted in Creation, with the Sabbath as its culmination, and the Garden traditionally on the site of the temple.

So holiness denotes the sphere of the divine, which is to be set apart, and is manifest in power particularly when its separation is not properly maintained. There are various stories in the Torah of disease and destruction resulting from improper contact with or handling of holy things such as the Ark. This dynamic power is divine, and so the holy is very much associated with the divine Presence. The relationship between holiness and Presence is unclear: holiness seems to be a precondition for the manifestation of the Presence, but is not to be equated with it. In practical terms, holiness can be measured and managed by priestly legislation, while Presence is entirely dependent upon God's action. The priestly conception of holiness expresses the distinctively scriptural perception of God as both transcendent (utterly separate) and powerfully immanent in His relationship with the world.

Related thoughts

-In every other religious group the concept of holiness entails a separation from the world. Not for Jews. We get involved.

-God would not give us a task that we could not carry out.

-Havdalah: Hamavdil ben kodesh l'chol -- he who separates sacred from profane

-The Hebrew Language is considered a "holy language"

-And the L-rd blessed the Seventh Day and made it holy [Gen. 2:3]

-"Holy, holy, holy! The Lord of Hosts!" (Is. 6:3); for "I the Lord am holy in Israel" (Ez. 39:7); "Through those near to Me I show Myself holy" (Lev. 10:3).

-Holiness; a fundamental concept of Judaism. The basic meaning is separation from the "general" and dedication to the "particular," as in the "Kiddushin," betrothal, of a "kallah," a bride, to her "chatan," or groom. In this context, she dedicates herself to him exclusively, out of the population of all the men in the world, as he in turn promises to her absolute loyalty and protective concern. Similarly, the concept applies to time, as in the

Holy Day of Shabbat and the Chagim, as well as to place, as in the Holy Land. It also applies to language, as in the Holy Hebrew Language, called so because it is the language of the Torah, it has no profanity, and among many other reasons, it is more than a set of symbols, as for example, the word "light" in English is merely a symbol for the real phenomenon of light, whereas the Hebrew word for light, "ohr," partakes, somehow, of the very essence of light. It applies to nations, as the Jewish People is called "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

-Genesis 38:21, where Judah asks Canaanite men of Adulam "Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side?". The Hebrew original employs the word "kedsha" in Judah's question, as opposed to the standard Hebrew "zonah". The word "Kidsha" is derived from the root KaDeSh, which signifies uniqueness and holiness; thus it possibly represents a religious prostitute, although it may be that the same rootword for 'holiness', KaDeSh, is used to express lasciviousness, being that both holiness and promiscuity can be described as 'separate', which is the real meaning of that root word.

-Elevate all actions: The laws of kashrut, too, are meant to elevate the mundane act of eating to the level of a holy sacrifice.