

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Kedoshim
May 7, 2022 *** Iyar 6, 5782

Kedoshim in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/75894/jewish/Kedoshim-in-a-Nutshell.htm

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

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

Haftarah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/668555/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah mentions G-d's repeated enjoinders to observe the commandments, keep the Shabbat and eschew idol worship; reflective of this week's Torah portion, which discusses many commandments, including the obligation to sanctify the Shabbat and reject idolatry.

The prophet Ezekiel transmit G-d's message, reminding the Jews how He chose them as His nation, how He took them out of Egypt and promised to take them to the Holy Land. In Egypt, G-d dispatched a prophet who exhorted the Jews to abandon their idols, yet they did not do so. He then gave them laws and statutes, including that of the observance of Shabbat as a sign between Him and His people. “But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they walked not in My statutes, and they despised My ordinances, which, if a man keep, he will live through them, and My Sabbaths they desecrated exceedingly.”

The prophet goes on to mention G-d's punishment of the Jews in the desert, namely that they did not enter the Holy Land. He then admonishes the children not to follow their fathers' ways, but to observe the laws and to sanctify the Shabbat.

Food For Thought

From Priest to People by the Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/kedoshim/from-priest-to-people/>

Something fundamental happens at the beginning of this parsha and the story is one of the greatest, if rarely acknowledged, contributions of Judaism to the world. Until now, Vayikra has been largely about sacrifices, purity, the Sanctuary, and the Priesthood. It has been, in short, about a holy place, holy offerings, and the elite and holy people – Aaron and his descendants – who minister there. Suddenly, in

chapter 19, the text opens up to embrace the whole of the people and the whole of life:

The Lord spoke to Moses: “Speak to all the community of Israel. Say: ‘Be holy, for I am holy; I, the Lord your God.’”

Lev. 19:1–2

This is the first and only time in Leviticus that so inclusive an address is commanded. The Sages explained this to mean that the contents of the chapter were proclaimed by Moses to a formal gathering of the entire nation (hakhel). It is the people as a whole who are commanded to “be holy”, not just an elite group of priests. It is life itself that is to be sanctified, as the chapter goes on to make clear. Holiness is to be made manifest in the way the nation makes its clothes and plants its fields, in the way justice is administered, workers are paid, and business conducted. The vulnerable – the deaf, the blind, the elderly, and the stranger – are to be afforded special protection. The whole society is to be governed by love, without resentments or revenge.

What we witness here, in other words, is the radical democratisation of holiness. All ancient societies had priests. We have encountered four instances in the Torah thus far of non-Israelite priests: Malchizedek, Abraham’s contemporary, described as a Priest of God Most High; Potiphera, Joseph’s father-in-law; the Egyptian Priests as a whole, whose land Joseph did not nationalise; and Yitro, Moses’ father-in-law, a Midianite Priest. The priesthood was not unique to Israel, and everywhere it was an elite. Here for the first time, we find a code of holiness directed to the people as a whole. We are all called on to be holy.

In a strange way, though, this comes as no surprise. The idea, if not the details, had already been hinted at. The most explicit instance comes in the prelude to the great covenant-making ceremony at Mount Sinai when God tells Moses to say to the people:

“Now, if you faithfully heed My Voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasure among all the peoples, although the whole earth is Mine. A kingdom of priests and a holy nation you shall be to Me.”

Ex. 19:5–6

Meaning, a kingdom all of whose members are to be in some sense priests, and a nation that is in its entirety holy.

The first intimation is much earlier still, in the first chapter of Genesis, with its monumental assertion:

“Let Us make humankind in Our image, in Our likeness.” So God created humankind in His own image: in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Gen. 1:26–27

What is revolutionary in this declaration is not that a human being could be in the image of God. That is precisely how kings of Mesopotamian city states and

Pharaohs of Egypt were regarded. They were seen as the representatives, the living images, of the gods. That is how they derived their authority. The Torah's revolution is the statement that not some but all humans share this dignity. Regardless of class, colour, culture, or creed, we are all in the image and likeness of God.

Thus was born the cluster of ideas that, though they took many millennia to be realised, led to the distinctive culture of the West: the non-negotiable dignity of the human person, the idea of human rights, and eventually, the political and economic expressions of these ideas – liberal democracy on the one hand, and the free market on the other.

The point is not that these ideas were fully formed in the minds of human beings during the period of biblical history. Manifestly, this is not so. The concept of human rights is a product of the seventeenth century. Democracy was not fully implemented until the twentieth. But already in Genesis 1 the seed was planted. That is what Jefferson meant when he wrote:

God who gave us life gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the Gift of God?[1]

The irony is that these three texts – Genesis 1, Exodus 19:6, and Leviticus 19 – are all spoken in the priestly voice Judaism calls *Torat Kohanim*.^[2] On the face of it, Priests were not egalitarian. They all came from a single tribe, the Levites, and from a single family within the tribe – that of Aaron. To be sure, the Torah tells us that this was not God's original intention. Initially it was to have been the firstborns – those who were saved from the last of the Ten Plagues – who were charged with special holiness as the ministers of God. It was only after the sin of the Golden Calf, in which only the tribe of Levi did not participate, that the change was made. Even so, the priesthood would have been an elite, a role reserved specifically for firstborn males. So deep is the concept of equality written into monotheism that it emerges precisely from the priestly voice – from which we would least expect it. The reason is this: religion in the ancient world was, not accidentally but essentially, a defence of hierarchy. With the development, first of agriculture, then of cities, what emerged were highly stratified societies with a ruler on top, surrounded by a royal court, beneath which was an administrative elite, and at the bottom an illiterate mass that was conscripted from time to time either as an army or as a *corvée*, a labour force used in the construction of monumental buildings. What kept the structure in place was an elaborate doctrine of a heavenly hierarchy whose origins were told in myth, whose most familiar natural symbol was the sun, and whose architectural representation was the pyramid or ziggurat, a massive building broad at the base and narrow at the top. The gods had fought and established an order of dominance and submission. To rebel against the earthly hierarchy was to challenge reality itself. This belief was universal in the ancient

world. Aristotle thought that some were born to rule, others to be ruled. Plato constructed a myth in his Republic in which class divisions existed because the gods had made some people with gold, some with silver, and others with bronze. This was the “noble lie” that had to be told if a society was to protect itself against dissent from within.

Monotheism removes the entire mythological basis of hierarchy. There is no order among the gods because there are no gods, there is only the one God, Creator of all. Some form of hierarchy will always exist: armies need commanders, films need directors, and orchestras, conductors. But these are functional, not ontological. They are not a matter of birth. So it is all the more impressive to find the most egalitarian sentiments coming from the world of the Priest, whose religious role was a matter of birth.

The concept of equality we find in the Torah specifically and in Judaism generally is not an equality of wealth: Judaism is not communism. Nor is it an equality of power: Judaism is not anarchy. It is fundamentally an equality of dignity. We are all equal citizens in the nation whose sovereign is God. Hence the elaborate political and economic structure set out in Leviticus, organised around the number seven, the sign of the holy. Every seventh day is free time. Every seventh year, the produce of the field belongs to all, Israelite slaves are to be liberated, and debts released. Every fiftieth year, ancestral land was to return to its original owners. Thus the inequalities that are the inevitable result of freedom are mitigated. The logic of all these provisions is the priestly insight that God, Creator of all, is the ultimate Owner of all:

“And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine. You are merely migrants and visitors to Me. Throughout the land that you possess, you must allow land to be redeemed.”

Lev. 25:23-24

God therefore has the right, not just the power, to set limits to inequality. No one should be robbed of dignity by total poverty, endless servitude, or unrelieved indebtedness.

What is truly remarkable, however, is what happened after the biblical era and the destruction of the Second Temple. Faced with the loss of the entire infrastructure of the holy, the Temple, its Priests, and sacrifices, Judaism translated the entire system of avodah, Divine service, into the everyday life of ordinary Jews. In prayer, every Jew became a Priest offering a sacrifice. In repentance, each became a High Priest, atoning for their sins and those of their people. Every synagogue, in Israel or elsewhere, became a fragment of the Temple in Jerusalem. Every table became an altar, every act of charity or hospitality, a kind of sacrifice.

Torah study, once the speciality of the priesthood, became the right and obligation of everyone. Not everyone could wear the crown of Priesthood, but everyone could wear the crown of Torah. A mamzer talmid chacham, a Torah scholar of illegitimate

birth, say the Sages, is greater than an am ha'aretz Kohen Gadol, an ignorant High Priest. Out of the devastating tragedy of the loss of the Temple, the Sages created a religious and social order that came closer to the ideal of the people as "a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation" than had ever previously been realised. The seed had been planted long before, in the opening of Leviticus 19:

"Speak to all the community of Israel. Say: 'Be holy, for I am holy; I, the Lord your God.'"

Holiness belongs to all of us when we turn our lives into the service of God, and society into a home for the Divine Presence. That is the moral life as lived by the kingdom of priests: a world where we aspire to come close to God by coming close, in justice and love, to our fellow humans.

[1] Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XVIII. [2] There is, of course, a prophetic call to equality also. We hear, in all the prophets, a critique of the abuse of power and the exploitation of the poor and powerless. What made the Priestly voice so significant is that it is the voice of law, and thus of the legal structures that alleviated poverty and set limits to slavery.

The Essence of Being a Jew by Rabbi Mari Chernow

<https://truah.org/resources/parshat-kedoshim-mari-chernow-moraltorah/>

There is a brief text that I study in the final session with all of my conversion students. Before they enter the mikvah and fully cast their lot with the Jewish people, I want them to read a discussion in the Talmud, tractate Yevamot, about what is required for conversion. As the rabbis of the Talmud debate the benchmarks for entering the community, they are, in effect, defining what is most essential in Judaism itself.

Surprisingly, this section (Yevamot 47a) gives a rabbi who is teaching a conversion student a great deal of discretion. The guiding rabbi must teach "some of the lenient mitzvot and some of the stringent mitzvot." It is notable that the sages do not specify that the student must learn about Jewish holidays, the life cycle, history, philosophy, or even theology. Though it is surely presumed, they do not even say that the rabbi must mention, for example, Shabbat! The sages trust that the rabbi will pass along the most crucial traditions and texts.

They do, however, specify that every student must learn the meaning of four specific mitzvot. All four of them address poverty and hunger. Two of them come from a well-known verse in this week's parshah, Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:9): "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest."

If the rabbis see themselves as the gatekeepers of the Jewish tradition, they are making a striking statement in this text: To become a Jew is to understand the urgency of poverty and food insecurity. To join the Jewish people is to take personal responsibility for income inequality and its consequences.

The website of Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger tells stories of hunger in America. To cite just a few examples, we read there:

“Feeding my young grandson properly is the priority so I have to find things that I know fill me up.” (Judith in Arizona)

“If sickness comes along, it can drain all your money in one day. That’s what happened to me.” (Barbara in New York)

“My mom doesn’t know it, but I quit baseball so she wouldn’t have to spend money on my uniform.” (Dylan in Kentucky)

These stories highlight what we already know to be true – that financial hardship stems not from laziness or complacency; it is a societal problem with deep roots in social injustice. That’s Kedoshim’s point – that those of us who own land (and its modern equivalent, a bank account) have an undeniable responsibility to support those who don’t.

In a recent *New York Times* Opinion piece, Ezra Klein writes about Joe Biden’s 2021 expanded child tax credit (April 17, “[America Has Turned Its Back on Its Poorest Families](#)”):

A study out of Columbia found it cut child poverty by more than 25 percent, pulling 3.4 million children above the poverty line, despite the raging Covid pandemic. Data from the census shows that the number of parents who said that their children didn’t have enough to eat fell by more than three million.”

What was unusual about the tax credit, he argues, is:

“There were no strings attached. It was just money. It could be used for child care, for food, for clothes, for anything. It treated parents, even poor parents, as the experts on their family’s finances, a quietly radical idea in American social policy.

Kedoshim has no litmus test for those who would share our crops. How refreshing! It assumes that all who come in search of food are worthy and deserving. It puts into daily practice what we all recited just weeks ago in the Haggadah, “**Let all who are hungry, come and eat!**” It teaches that society will become whole only when those of us with resources acknowledge that our abundance is not ours alone. When we agree that abundance is best used to restore balance.

Klein refers to the “moral horror, that a country as wealthy as ours leaves so many children in poverty.” Kedoshim seeks to rectify that reality. Yevamot tells us that doing so is the very essence of what it means to be a Jew.

(Rabbi Mari Chernow is the Senior Rabbi of Temple Israel of Hollywood, in Los Angeles)

[Fruit Trees and Foreskins by Naama Weiss](#)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/fruit-trees-and-foreskins/>

In Parashat Kedoshim, the Torah introduces the commandment of orlah (עֲרֻלָּה), where one is forbidden from eating fruit that grows in the first three years after a

tree's planting:

וְכִי-תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ וְנִטְעַתֶּם כָּל-עֵץ מֵאֵל וְעַרְלֹתֶם עַרְלֹתוֹ אֶת-פְּרִיָו שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים יִהְיֶה לָכֶם עֵרְלִים לֹא יֵאָכֵל:

When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. (Lev. 19:23)

But the use of the word orlah here has puzzled generations of commentators, for though it appears frequently in the Torah, it is not typically connected to trees. Indeed we primarily associate the term with circumcision. How are the two uses of orlah related? And can tracing this relationship reveal something new about the rite of circumcision itself?

Rashi interprets the expression *vearaltem orlato* עַרְלֹתֶם וְעַרְלֹתוֹ as opaque and sealed, meaning that the tree will be closed and unattainable. The Aramaic translation (Onkelos) uses *uterahakun rahka* וְתִרְחֲקוּן רַחְקָא meaning “keep away from.” In the Bible orlah appears most commonly in the context of circumcision, in the sense of flesh covering a body organ (Gen. 17:14). This meaning fits the appearance of the word in various combinations: *aral sefataym* עֵרֶל שְׁפָתַיִם (Exod. 6:12, 30) when excess skin on the lips interferes with speech, *arela oznam* עֵרְלָה אֶזְנָם (Jeremiah 6:10) when excess skin on the ear interferes with hearing, and figuratively, *levavam he-arel* לְבָבָם הָעֵרֶל (Lev. 26:41) when a cover over the heart interferes with feeling.

While etymological development seems to be from the concrete to the borrowed and the abstract; from *orlat habasar* עַרְלַת הַבָּשָׂר—the foreskin of the flesh, to *orlat haets* עַרְלַת הָעֵץ—the forbidden fruit, Midrash Genesis Rabbah flips the direction in its discussion of Abraham’s circumcision.

The Midrash opens with a parable about a noblewoman:

“Walk before Me and be blameless,” (Gen. 17:1) Rabbi Levi said it is like a noblewoman to whom the king said. [Would you] pass before me. So, she passed before him, and her face blushed [lit. became as orange as turmeric.] She thought, what if some flaw is found on me? The king replied. You have no flaw, except an overgrown nail on your little finger. Cut it and the defect will be gone. This is what God said to Abraham: There is nothing wrong with you but this foreskin, remove it and get rid of the defect and walk before me and be blameless.

(Genesis Rabbah 46:4)

The parallel drawn between Abraham and a female figure is a creative way of including women in the idea of circumcision. But why do the rabbis need to include women? The reason becomes clear in the second part of the Midrash, where circumcision is linked to fertility. Here the rabbis discuss how Abraham knows that “the flesh of your orlah” בָּשָׂר עַרְלֹתְכֶם is the foreskin. After all, orlah can be a skin or flesh that covers any body organ.

R. Hunah said in the name of Bar Kaparah. Abraham sat and pondered similar

laws of inference (gzera shava גְּזֵרָה שְׁוָה). Orlah is used in reference to a human and to a tree. Just as orlah in a tree refers to the place it bears fruits, so also orlah in a human is in the place where he gives fruits (i.e. produces offspring). To explicitly answer the question of how Abraham knew that orlah was the foreskin, the Midrash uses Talmudic hermeneutics and learns from the orlah of the tree's fruits that circumcision should be connected to the organ of fertility. In the third part of the Midrash, Rabi Haninah Ben Pazi disagrees with his predecessors and claims that Abraham received a hint from God that circumcision is related to fertility: "I will establish my covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous" (Gen. 17:2), that is: I will establish my covenant in the place where (in his body) he will multiply (Genesis Rabbah Ibid.).

This connection between circumcision and fertility is related to a cultural perception that the foreskin symbolizes an excess of masculinity that may threaten a woman's fertility. In this context, foreskin removal can be interpreted as creating a balance between male and female which is necessary for conception.

The link between circumcision and fertility also appears in the biblical text itself when the announcement of Isaac's birth interrupts God's commandment of circumcision (Gen. 17:10–14) and its execution by Abraham (Ibid. 23–27). As in the Midrash, the biblical narrative highlights that the connection between circumcision and fertility requires the involvement of the woman. Thus, in addition to the mitzvah of circumcision, Genesis includes a name change ceremony where both Abraham and Sarah receive the same addition to their name (Ibid. 15). Also, we may understand Sarah as undergoing a parallel physiological process to Abraham (which also involves bleeding) before conception (Gen. 18:11–12).

The Midrash highlights the aforementioned physiological changes that Abraham and Sarah experience simultaneously (circumcision for Abraham and renewal of menstruation for Sarah) using the image of two locks that can be repaired (so that they can be opened again) only by the same craftsman who created them (Genesis Rabbah 48:19). The Babylonian Talmud refers to this parallel infertility by calling Abraham and Sarah "tumtumin" טומטומין (Yevamot 64a), individuals whose sex is unknown because their genitalia are covered or hidden. This image represents a return to the primordial androgynous state in which man was created. The existence of both sexes in one organism brings us back to the use of the term orlah as referring to a tree as a mostly monoecious plant, i.e., having both the female and male reproductive organs.

The literary connection that the Midrash makes between the orlah of the tree and the orlah of man reveals complex cultural work that mediates between two different species. This link leads to an understanding of circumcision as connected to fertility and requiring the involvement of both sexes. We see this reflected in the broader literary activity of the biblical text and in the Midrash, which strive for a balance between Abraham and Sarah in the context of the commandment of

circumcision and connect it to the announcement of the birth of Isaac. In this sense, the rabbis' motive for connecting circumcision with fertility can be understood as an attempt to deal with the problematic lack inherent in this commandment—the absence of the woman. (*Naama Weiss is Adjunct Instructor of Hebrew at JTS*)

Parshat Kedoshim: Societal Norms Reassessed by Rabbi Carmi Wisemon

<https://www.growtorah.org/vayikra/2022/05/05-parshat-kedoshim-societal-norms-reassessed>

“You shall not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person; and you shall have fear of your God—I am Hashem.”[1] This directive has been widely explained in its figurative sense of prohibiting one to lead another to his detriment.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch details actions that fall into the category of placing a stumbling block: “he who deliberately gives wrong advice, who gives the means, or prepares the way for wrong...who in any way actively or passively assists or furthers people in doing wrong....transgresses this prohibition. Thus the whole great sphere of the material and spiritual happiness of our neighbor is entrusted to our care.”[2]

Rav Hirsch's conclusion carries a meaningful and somewhat eerie message for the post-industrial world. Has modern society misled us in regards to our material and spiritual happiness? Have we even conflated the two?

Contained within contemporary society, lies a severe and far-reaching stumbling block, which has led to abuse of the environment by endangering the earth's delicate ecosystems and limited natural resources. At the turn of the 20th century, the Industrial Revolution allowed a higher quality of life for many Americans due to expanded production capabilities. Alongside this quality increase came a heightened emphasis on consumerism—the public mindset intent on over-consumption beyond people's actual needs. Consumerism equates personal happiness with purchasing more and more material possessions. The businesses and governments who stood to gain from increased trade overlooked the public's moral shortcoming and “blinded” them by perpetuating their pursuit of the material. In his book, Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism, Richard H. Robbins explains that for consumerism to take hold in the United States, the public's perception and buying habits had to be transformed.[3] Advertising aggressively shaped consumer desires. It imbued commodities with the power to transform the consumer into a more desirable person. Luxuries became necessities. In 1880, \$30 million was invested in advertising in the United States. Today, that figure has climbed to well over \$120 billion; even adjusting for inflation, that figure has jumped by about \$119 billion. The advent of the credit card in the 1950s, enabled people to buy things that they would not normally consider purchasing. Originally meant to stimulate economic growth, credit shopping unfortunately leads to increased consumer debt.

The US Department of Commerce, created in 1921, serves to illustrate the role of the federal government in the promotion of consumption. The Commerce Department encouraged maximum consumption of commodities, producing films and leaflets advocating single-dwelling homes over multi-unit dwellings and suburban housing over urban housing. Our present standard of housing is just one example of how the powers of consumerism have changed accepted norms, creating raised expectations of standards of living and are subsequently causing us to deplete more of the earth's natural resources. [4]

A great many of our environmental concerns are caused by the subtle, but potentially lethal stumbling block of consumerism. It can be found in crises such as global warming (by increasing burning of fossil fuels), species extinction (through the clearing of forests), the proliferation of landfills, and subsequent contamination of water from the residue of the chemicals used to produce more material goods. While Hashem has created a planet for us to enjoy, we must be honest with ourselves in identifying the line where enjoyment becomes misuse.

Today we find ourselves simultaneously the victims and culprits of "lifnei iver lo titen michshol." We may wish to challenge ourselves to produce, sell and consume less products. Leading up to moments where we might spend significant funds on material purchases or moments of buying a one dollar toy, we can make a big impact by considering the consequences of our actions. The Jewish and environmental response is to re our levels of consumption. In a world in which we often trip into society's current norms, our goal should be to ethically and intelligently consume. [1] Vayikra 19:14 [2] In his commentary on the Torah, Vayikra 19:14 [3] Allyn and Bacon, 1999 [4] Another example of a change in accepted norms for the

worse is the credit card. Workers were given higher wages to increase their buying power in order to be able to create a consumer economy. The world's first credit card was introduced in the United States in the 1950s, expanding consumer credit by enabling people to buy things that they would not normally consider purchasing. By the 1970s shopping habits had been transformed by credit. An effect of this credit was to increase consumer debt, while creating mass markets for consumer goods that stimulated economic growth. (*Carmi Wisemon is Executive Director of Sviva Israel, a social environmental organization that activates Israelis to take responsibility for the environment and fosters a sense of concern for others by building a caring community based on principles of sustainable development from a Jewish perspective. A graduate of the Meretz Kollel, Carmi received smicha from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and an MSW from Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University. He is the editor of the annual journal of "The Environment in Jewish Thought and Law".*)

Yahrtzeits

Al Gottlieb remembers his mother Gertrude Gottlieb on Sun. May 8 (Iyar 7)

Merna Most remembers her father Henry Handleman on Sun. May 8 (Iyar 7)

Steve Kissner remembers his mother Mollie Kissner on Tues. May 10 (Iyar 9)

