



The Holiness of Parshat Kedoshim and Yerushalayim

What is sanctity? What does it mean to be “holy like God” as is commanded in the first verse of this week’s parsha? While there are many approaches to this question, Dr. Yosef Preil of Bar Ilan suggests that a careful rest of the parsha can aid us in gaining a crucial perspective.¹

He notes that the phrase “I am God” is repeated over twenty times in the parsha, following the model of the opening verse which commands us to be holy, “for I your God is holy.” These twenty appearances of this phrase occur at a seeming array of commandments. Keeping Shabbat, honoring one’s parents, having proper intentions while offering a sacrifice, and leaving fallen stalks for the poor are all connected with “I am God.”

While more research would be required to explain the specific commandments, Dr. Preil notes that one thing is immediately noticeable regarding this list: it concludes ritual commandments between man and God as well as commandments that focus on proper interpersonal behavior. Being “holy like God” requires a synthesis between these two poles of religious life. God attaches His name to not only ritual details of the sacrificial order, but also to honoring one’s parents and caring for the poor. Both are part of being holy.

With this background we can understand why Yerushalayim is referred to as a holy city.² On the one hand, Yerushalayim allows us to live in proximity to the Divine Presence. It is the home of God in this world. At the same time, though, Yerushalayim represents Jewish unity and brotherhood. It is the city which “makes all of the Jewish people into friends,”³ the unifying symbol that can rally an often fractured people. It is this confluence of the spiritual and the social – being close to God and

¹ <https://www.biu.ac.il/jh/parasha/kedoshim/per.html>

² See, Tosefta Nega'im 6:2.

³ Yerushalmi Chagiga 2:6.



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to fellow man – that is part of the Torah's definition of holiness. Yerushalayim, therefore, is our holiest city.

Even today, bereft of the Beit HaMikdash, this feeling continues. Many people come to Yerushalayim on a chag to visit and pray at the Kotel. While these visits are clearly spiritual in nature and stem from a desire to come close to God on these sanctified days, they almost always contain a social component. People meet old friends in Yerushalayim. They meet family members at the Kotel. Two families that did not previously know each other sit next to each other in the Rova and a relationship is kindled. Yerushalayim, particularly on the holiest of days, fuses the spiritual and the social.

May we merit the true sanctity of the fullness of our relationship with God and fellow people.