

Defining Holiness ©

By Dr. Akiva G. Belk

Parshas Emor  
Leviticus 21.1 - 24.23

This Devri Torah Parshat is in the loving memory of Mr. Gary Lee Belk and Mr. Donald Wayne Belk, may they rest in peace.

This week we in our Devri Limood we discussed Rising to Yaakov's Level of Righteousness. There we stated that righteous people make mistakes. We discussed the mistakes of Yaakov and other great people of history. We are going to continue this discussion with defining holiness.

Within our universe there seems to be a misconception of what it means to be holy. We must consider the questions: What is Holy? What is Holiness? Who defines what Holy means? Does it matter who defines the meaning of Holiness?

Simply put Holiness is SEPARATION! Can one make a mistake and still be separated? Yes and no! It depends upon the mistake. Can one make several mistakes and still be separated? Yes and no! It depends upon the mistake.

The Story Of the Shwartzah Wolf

So often we look so holy with our long black coats, our black hats, our black kippas, our short hair, our payos, our long dresses, our sheitels, our outward actions, our Shabbos attendance, our davening and many other outward appearances. The problem with outward appearances is that too often they are founded on showtime pretenses. They are not real. Good habits are important. And they are healthy. Yet, to suggest that smoking and drinking among other habits are the soil for sinners is wrong. In fact, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, may he rest in peace, related the story of the Shwartzah Wolf as told to the Belzer Rebbe by the great grandson. There was a man who for many years had no children. And the gates of heaven were closed to him and his wife. This man was instructed to get a bracha from the Shwartzah Wolf. As the head of the thirty-six tzaddikim, he was the only one who could open the gates of Heaven.

However, the Shwartzah Wolf, a woodchuck living in the forest, was a very unpopular Jew in the community. He was described as being obnoxious. And his wife's words and his children's actions could not be repeated. This is a man who was not given an aliya at the community shul and for whose funeral the men of the shul did not want to make a minyan. Yet he was the head of the thirty-six tzaddikim, the only one who could open the gates of Heaven.

This desperate individual devised a plan to obtain the blessing from the Shwartzah Wolf. He would appear at the Shwartzah Wolf's home as a Jew acting lost in the forest shortly before Shabbos. His thinking was, "They will be forced to offer me accommodations." He knocked on the door. The wife of the Shwartzah Wolf appeared at the door, so ugly, so vial, so intimidating. The children behind her were mean like little devils. The house was in disarray, unkept and untidy. The home of the tzaddik felt like a scary place.

The Yid said, "I'm lost in the forest, Shabbos is about to begin, may I please stay at your house?"

She cursed at him and directed him to the barn where he could sleep on the hay. She warned him that her husband would kill him if he came near the house during Shabbos.

Late that evening, the Shwartzah Wolf appeared before him in the barn and warned him, "I expect you to be gone two minutes after Shabbos is over. Don't open the door to my house or I'll kill you with my bare hands."

The Yid was terrified. He was a dead man. His wife would be childless. The Shwartzah Wolf would not give him the bracha. The gates of Heaven would remain closed. Then late on Shabbos afternoon he began to cry. He fell to his knees there in the barn, openly sobbing out of control as he remembered his tears could open the gates of Heaven. It was at that time that the barn door flew open and there stood the Shwartzah Wolf, shining as the High Priest, inviting him to the third meal of Shabbos, Shalosh Seudos.

They entered the home together. The wife of the Shwartzah Wolf was exquisitely beautiful, the children were well behaved and adorable, shining like little priests. The house was immaculate and tidy like the Bais HaMikdash.

The Shwartzah Wolf said, "I know why you have come, and the gates of Heaven are open to you.. I grant you your request. I bless you with a son. I have only one request, that you name him after me."...

The Yid trembled with excitement as he traveled home to share the news with his wife...The next morning in shul he learned that the Shwartzah Wolf had died, may he rest in peace.

Reb Shlomo goes on to explain that a tzaddik of this position is a mirror that reflects our own neshama. So if we use inappropriate language or if our behavior is obnoxious then the tzaddik only mirrors what we truly are. The tzaddik does NOT mirror what we appear to be or what others think we are. On the other hand, if we are holy, the tzaddik mirrors that holiness.

So the point is real holiness may NOT be based on the conformity of how one dresses or if one lives in a community or one's education or one's position in the community. The tzaddik could be the woodchuck in the wilderness who cannot bear community incongruity. It gives us something to think about...

As we review these questions let's begin by saying it greatly matters who defines holiness.

Recently a staff member at JewishPath was sharing notes from a class that he attended. The class leader was discussing a Jew's responsibility to live by the Torah's definition of what it means to be Jewish. This discussion was in an Orthodox shul to Orthodox Jews. The class leader stated that Jews who dress "LIKE" from Jews need to live within the Torah's definition / expectation of frumkeit!

In the same way, the world needs to understand what holiness is and who defines what holiness is. Holiness is not up for personal interpretation. Holiness was predefined before the Creation of man or religion. Holiness was defined by Hashem!

The Tenach states, "There is none holy as Hashem for there is none besides You: neither is there any rock like our G-d." 1Sam. 2:2

The Torah clearly states that Hashem expects Kal Yisroel to be holy! Why?

"You shall be Holy, {WHY?} for I Hashem, your G-d, Am Holy." Leviticus 19:2

"You shall be Holy to Me, {WHY?} for I Hashem, Am Holy." Leviticus 20:26

"You shall make him {the Kohen} Holy {even against his will, Rashi} {WHY?} for he offers the bread of your G-d; he shall be Holy unto you {WHY?} for I, Hashem, Am Holy, Who makes you Holy." Leviticus 21:8

Again, the point is Hashem expects Kal Yisroel to be Holy! Why?

Kal Yisroel is called by His Name... "If My people, which are called by My Name..." "and My people, upon whom My Name is proclaimed..." 2 Chronicles 7:14

"Speak to Aharon and to his sons and let them keep away from the holy offerings of B'nei Yisroel {on the days of their impurities, Rashi} and they shall not profane My Holy Name which they sanctify for Me, I am Hashem." Leviticus 22:2

"You shall not profane My Holy Name but I Will be Sanctified among, B'nei Yisroel. I am Hashem Who Makes you Holy." Leviticus 22:32

This tells us something about a Jew's responsibility. We are NOT TO PROFANE Hashem's Holy Name! Instead we are to SANCTIFY HASHEM'S HOLY NAME! No other people or religion is given this great and holy responsibility! Only Kal Yisroel is held responsible to SANCTIFY HASHEM'S HOLY NAME! So how do we fulfill our important responsibility? What is our guideline? The Torah of Hashem is our guide.

### **Kal Yisroel**

#### **Kal**

$$50 = \text{כ} = 30 + \text{ו} = 20 +$$

#### **Yisroel**

$$541 = \text{י} = 30 + \text{ל} = 1 + \text{ר} = 200 + \text{ש} = 300 + \text{י} = 10$$

$$591 = 50 + 541$$

### **Ah Nee Hashem Mi Kah Deesh Chem**

#### **Ah Nee Hashem**

$$87 = \text{ה} = 5 + \text{ל} = 6 + \text{ה} = 5 + \text{י} = 10 + \text{י} = 10 + \text{נ} = 50 + \text{א} = 1 +$$

#### **Mi Kah Deesh Chem**

$$504 = \text{מ} = 40 + \text{ו} = 20 + \text{ש} = 300 + \text{ד} = 4 + \text{ה} = 100 + \text{ח} = 40$$

$$591 = 87 = 504$$

Blessings Health, Prosperity, Kindness and Peace,

Dr. Akiva Gamliel