

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

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Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel, RIETS

Adapted from Rabbi Schachter's article in *Rav Chesed* Vol. II by Rabbi Mordechai Djavaheri



KEDUSHAS YISROEL

Preserving the Tzelem Elokim and Being an Ohr LaGoyim

The pesukim in Parashas Ki Savo (28:9-10) state:

יְקִימְךָ ה' לְעַם קְדוֹשׁ כְּאִשֶּׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְךָ כִּי תִשְׁמֹר אֶת מִצְוֹת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו. וְרָאוּ כָּל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שָׁם ה' נִקְרָא עֲלֶיךָ וְיִרְאוּ מִפָּנֶיךָ.

The Lord will establish you as His holy people, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your G-d and walk in His ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord's name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you.

The Gemara in *Brachos* 6a, derives from the verse “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord’s name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you” to refer to the *tefillin shel rosh*. Clearly, this is an additional level of interpretation and not the simple understanding. However, the Gemara in *Sanhedrin*

34a teaches us that “*ein haMikra yotze midei peshuto*” — the simple level of interpretation is also important.¹ In *Aderes Eliyahu*, they quote the Vilna Gaon as saying that the simple meaning of the pasuk is that it refers to the end of the previous pasuk — “*v'holachta bid'rachav*” — that we have to emulate Hakadosh Baruch Hu, which the Rambam counts as a *mitzvas asei* (8). The Torah tells us that we should preserve our *tzelem Elokim* (image of G-d) by going in the ways of Hashem and emulating His attributes; then, when all of the nations of the world see that we have succeeded in preserving our *tzelem Elokim*, they will learn from us how to act with *yiras Shamayim*. The nations of the world also have *tzelem Elokim*, and they can preserve that *tzelem Elokim* by following the ways of Hashem. When they see that we were successful in preserving the *tzelem Elokim* inside of us, the Shem Hashem that we’re called by, and that they were also created with a *tzelem Elokim*, they

will learn from us the concepts of *yiras Shamayim* and emulating Hashem.

This pasuk in Ki Savo is the source for what Yeshaya HaNavi (49:6) calls “*ohr lagoyim*” — that klal Yisroel has a duty in this world to show the nations of the world the path to follow. It doesn’t mean that we show them the laws of Shabbos, kashrus, and *taharas hamishpacha*. Those laws are not relevant to them. The idea is that we have to teach them to preserve their *tzelem Elokim*.²

The pasuk at the beginning of Parashas Kedoshim (19:2) states:

דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם.

Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your G-d, am holy.

We have to be *kedoshim* like HaKadosh Baruch Hu who is *Kadosh*, because we have a spark of *kedushah* in our *neshamos*. We have to preserve the *kedushah* that we were born with.

Incomplete Kedushah

There is a midrash, *Vayikra Rabbah* 24, that serves as the basis for Rav Shimon Shkop's introduction to *Shaarei Yosher*, which states:

קדושים תהיו יכול כמוני ת"ל כי קדוש אני
קדושתו למעלה מקדושתכם.
"You shall be holy," perhaps this means
that you shall be like Me? The end of the
verse states "for I am holy," My holiness
is greater than yours.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu has a higher level of *kedushah* and we can't achieve that level. While the observation of the midrash is true — we cannot possibly achieve the same level of holiness as G-d — the interpretation of the pasuk doesn't seem to reflect the simple meaning of the pasuk. The simple meaning is that we should preserve the *kedushah* that's already in us as a function of our being created with a *tzelem Elokim*. Where did the Tannaim learn that it teaches us that Hashem has greater *kedushah*?

Rav Avraham ben Meir Jacobs, in his sefer *Maleh veChasser beTanach*, suggests that the midrash's *drasha* is based on how *kedoshim tehiyu* is written *chasser* (without a *vav*), while *ki kadosh Ani* is written *malei* (with a *vav*). Hakadosh Baruch Hu's *kedushah* is complete, but the level of *kedushah* He demands of us is one that is incomplete.³

Kedushas Chesed

We have the minhag of reading Megillas Rus on Shavuos. Rav Soloveitchik said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that we read it on Shavuos since many details of *Hilchos Geirus* (the laws of conversion) are derived from the conversation between Naomi and Rus, and Shavuos

commemorates the conversion of the Jewish People. Just like Am Yisrael entered the covenant with Hashem through *milah*, *tevilah*, and a *korban*, so, too, the convert requires these three components in order to convert (*Kerisus* 9a). Ma'amad Har Sinai was the *geirus* of Klal Yisroel, so we read about the *geirus* of Rus on Shavuos.

There's a famous midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 601) that points out the message of Megilas Rus:

אמר רבי זעירא המגילה הזו אין בה לא
טומאה ולא טהרה לא היתר ולא איסור, ולמה
נכתבה, ללמדך שכר של גומלי חסדים.
Rav Zeira said, this book has no [laws
of] impurity or purity, no ritual matters
of what is permissible or prohibited. Why
was it written? To teach you the reward
for those who perform acts of kindness.

Perhaps these two ideas are one. The primary attribute of *kedushas Yisroel*, which is brought about through conversion, is *gemilus chasadim* (acts of kindness).

Rav Shimon Shkop posits that *kedushah* is total dedication of our energies and actions for Klal Yisroel. When somebody always strives to take care of Klal Yisroel, then everything he does, even taking care of his own personal needs, becomes a part of the mitzvah of *kedusha*. By taking care of himself, he takes care of the *rabbim* who need him. When all of our actions are intended to help others, we partially emulate Hakadosh Baruch Hu, whose entire creation of the world was for the purpose of giving to mankind. That's what He wants: That all of our actions should be sanctified for assisting others. At the same time, we shouldn't crush our natural inclination to take care of ourselves, thinking that we can reach greater heights of *Kedushah* and emulating Hashem through total altruism. That

is what the midrash teaches: Hashem's *kedushah* is complete, and ours is not. We cannot fully reach that level.

Clearly, Rav Shimon Shkop thinks the main idea of *kedushas Yisroel* is *gemillus chasadim*, similar to what Hillel told the prospective *ger* about "veahavta lere'acha kamocha" being the whole Torah and the rest is commentary (*Shabbos* 31a). The Gemara (*Yevamos* 79a) also tells us:

שלשה סימנים יש באומה זו הרחמנים
והביישנים וגומלי חסדים.
There are three identifying characteristics
of this nation: they are merciful, bashful
and they perform acts of kindness.

One of the three identifying characteristics of the Jewish people is "gomlei chasadim," and this is codified in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Even HoEzer* 2:2) as well. The Acharonim consider the possibility that lacking any of the three, not just all of them, can make one's lineage suspect — maybe he's lacking in his *kedushas Yisroel*.⁴

Endnotes

1. See *Ginas Egoz* page 186.
2. See "The Meaning of Am Hanivchar; the Source of Anti-Semitism" (2014) on TorahWeb.org.
3. He makes a similar point about how the person who sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *parah aduma* on someone who is *tamei meis* must be *tahor* — that the word "hatahor" is written *chasser* to indicate that even if his *tahara* is incomplete it is also acceptable. Even though this isn't included explicitly on the list of *Middos ShehaTorah Nidreshes Bahem*, the Gemara does employ it in other places as well. In *Kesubos* 40b, the Chachamim hold that a *ketanah* gets *keness* except for *motzi shem ra*, because usually the word "na'arah" is written *chasser* to include even a *ketana*, an incomplete *na'arah*. By *motzi shem ra*, *na'arah* is written *malei*, so *ketana* is excluded.
4. See "Incomplete Kedusha" on TorahWeb.org.