

Kedushah: Where Humans Dare to Tread

And you shall sanctify Me amidst the Children of Israel” (*Vayikra* 22:32) proclaims our obligation, and asserts our privilege, to sanctify the Name of God in deeds, such as martyrdom and ethical behavior,⁴⁸⁷ and in word. In our liturgy this finds expression in those recitations deemed “*devarim she-bi-kedushah*,” including *Barekhu*, the various forms of *Kaddish*,⁴⁸⁸ and, the subject of our discussion, the *Kedushah*.⁴⁸⁹

The weekday *Kedushah* consists of a call and response (which R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik explained is the essential structure of every “*davar she-bi-kedushah*”) consisting of three verses: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is filled with His glory” (*Yeshayahu* 6:3), “Blessed is the glory of God from His place” (*Yechezkel* 3:12), and “God shall reign forever, your God, Zion, from generation to generation, Hallelujah” (*Tehillim* 146:10). Its recitation on weekdays was not originally a universal practice. *Tosafot*,⁴⁹⁰ commenting on the biblical verse, “From the uttermost part of the earth (*mi-kenaf ha-aretz*) we heard songs” (*Yeshayahu* 24:15), write:

It is written in the responsa of the *Ge'onim* that the residents of the Land of Israel recited *Kedushah* only on *Shabbat*, as it is written [in *Yeshayahu* 6 ch. 6] regarding the angels, [that] each had six wings. With each wing the angels would recite one song each weekday.⁴⁹¹ When *Shabbat* came, the angels entreated God, “Master of the Universe, we do not have another wing with which to sing!” God answered them, “I have one more wing [i.e., the Jewish people] who will recite *shirah* (songs) before Me [on *Shabbat*],” as it says, “From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs.”

The angels, unable to proclaim God’s holiness on the Sabbath, left that privilege to us, the Jewish people. Thus, every *Shabbat*, we, like the angels, call to one another and sing *Sanctus*. It is for this reason that the *chazan*, in *nusach Ashkenaz*, invites us, with the words “*Nekadesh...We will sanctify Your Name on earth just as they sanctify It in the highest heavens*” and “*Na’aritzkha...We will revere You and sanctify You according to the counsel of the holy Seraphim who sanctify Your Name*” to respond, “*Kadosh*.” According to this tradition then, our words truly are *devarim she-bi-kedushah* – they are holy, angelic, heavenly! According to this practice, Israel and the angels are partners in the service of Heaven and one day a week Israel is elevated to angelic status.

The Babylonian Jewish community recited *Kedushah* daily. The basis of this practice may be understood through the narrative found in *Chullin* 91b, which begins with an account of the aftermath of Jacob’s struggle with the angel:

“And [the angel] said, ‘Let me go, for the day breaks.’” (*Bereishit* 32:27). [Jacob] said to him, “Are you a thief or a scoundrel that you are afraid of the morning?” He replied, “I am an angel, and from the day that I was created

⁴⁸⁷. *Yoma* 86a; *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, XV, col. 340–360; Mark Dratch, “The Shame of It All: The Real Shonda in Revealing Abuse” at http://www.jsafe.org/pdfs/-Hillul_Hashem.pdf; Norman Lamm, “Kiddush Hashem and Hillul Hashem,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, X, col. 977–983; Norman Lamm, *Kedushah ve-Kaddish*, -“*Halakhot va-Halikhhot*,” Mosad HaRav Kook, 5750, pp. 45–52; Avraham Holtz, “Kiddush Hashem and Hillul Hashem,” *Judaism* 10:4 (1961), 360–367; Ephraim Urbach, “*Hazal: Pirkei Emunot ve-De’ot*,” 313–316.

⁴⁸⁸. *Shibbolei Ha-Leket Ha-Shalem*, Mirsky (5726), 149–150..

⁴⁸⁹. Zohar, *Raya Mehemna*, *Emor* 93a. *Sefer ha-Orah*, 129, states, “[Rashi] answered, ‘We have not found the obligation to recite *Kedushah* anywhere in the Talmud.’” For a history of the development of the *Kedushah* see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin; Philadelphia and Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 54–61. For an analysis of the verb forms of *k-d-sh* and suggested translations see also Avraham Holtz, “The Concept of Qiddush Hashem in the Jewish Prayer Book,” *Harvard Theological Review* 57:2 (1964), 137–140.

⁴⁹⁰. *Sanhedrin* 37b, s.v. *mi-kenaf ha-aretz zemirot shaman*.

⁴⁹¹. The relationship between angelic wings and song is hinted at in the verse, “I heard the noise of their wings” (*Yechezkel* 1:24).

my time to sing God's praises had not come until now." This supports the statement of R. Chananel in the name of Rav [who said]: Three divisions of ministering angels sing praises to God daily; one proclaims: "Holy," the other proclaims: "Holy," and the third proclaims: "Holy is the Lord of Hosts" (*Yeshayahu* 6:3). An objection was raised: Israel is dearer to the Holy One, blessed be He, than the ministering angels, for Israel sings praises to God continually, whereas the ministering angels sing praises only once a day. (Others say: once a week; and others say: once a month; and others say: once a year; and others say: once in seven years; and others say: once in a Jubilee; and others say: once in eternity.) And whereas Israel mentions the Name of God after two words, as it is said, "*Shema Yisrael Hashem...Hear, Israel, the Lord*" (*Devarim* 6:4), the ministering angels only mention the Name of God after three words, as it is written, "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh Hashem...Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of hosts.*" Furthermore, the ministering angels do not begin to sing praises in heaven until Israel has sung below on earth [this refers to the recitation of *Shema Yisrael*], for it is said, "When the morning stars [i.e., Israel] sang together, then all the sons of God [i.e., the angels] shouted for joy!" (*Iyov* 38:7).

According to this tradition, the *Sanctus* is exclusively the song of the angels; *Shema Yisrael* is the song of Israel. The angels proclaim God's holiness, while Israel declares God's unity and His *malkhut* (-sovereignty). And it is the song of Israel that has greater potency and -priority. -Nevertheless, there is a vision, a messianic one, that we find in the introduction to the *Kedushah* in the Sephardic rite:

Keter yitnu lekha Hashem Elokeinu, malakhim hamonei mala im amekha Yisrael kevutzei matah, yachad kulam Kedushah lekha yeshaleishu.

They will give a crown to You, Lord our God, (by) the angels who are the multitude above along with Your people Israel who are gathered below, together they will recite the three-fold *Kedushah*.

Here there is no "*nekadesh...ke-shem she-makdishim,*" no invitation to sanctify God's Name. Here there is no "*nakdishkha ke-sod si'ach,*" no appropriation of an angelic assertion. Here there is a glorious vision of a redeemed future in which a holy choir of human and holy hosts combines cherubic and saintly voices in the hallowing of Heaven.

For whatever the historical reasons beyond the scope of this brief essay, all Jews today recite *Kedushah* daily, not as individuals but as a *tzibur*, a holy community. From the perspective of the ancient *Eretz Yisrael* practice in which *Kedushah* was recited once a week on *Shabbat*, we must ask: Are we fools rushing in where angels tread? I think not.

Let us offer two answers as to why: First, perhaps it is through this daily recitation of *Kedushah* that we express our love and longing for God, and our ache to sing about His holiness. The words of Frank Sinatra, Ol' Blue Eyes himself, indicate the popular awareness of the power of human longing:⁴⁹²

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread
And so I come to you my love
My heart above my head

Though I see
The danger there
If there's a chance for me
Then I don't care

Fools rush in
Where wise men never go
But wise men never fall in love
So how are they to know

When we met
I felt my life begin
So open up your heart and let
This fool rush in.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹². "Fools Rush In," Lyrics by Johnny Mercer and Rube Bloom.

⁴⁹³. Consider, also, Elvis Presley, "Only Fools Rush In,"

Second, perhaps our daily recitation of the *Kedushah* – with the invitation of “*kara zeh el zeh*,” the give-and-take, answer-and-response between *chazan* and congregation, recited only as a *minyan* gathers together – is inspired by the messianic vision of Yeshayahu (52:6–9):

Therefore my people shall know My name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am He that doth speak: Behold, it is I. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring back Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem.

Yeshayahu’s prophetic poetry contains within it the secret to redemption: “Together they shall sing...they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring back Zion.” Yeshayahu teaches us that it is only when Jews see eye to eye with each other, only when “together they shall sing” so that when one Jew calls out others respond, and only when Jews gather together to create a *kehillah kedoshah* (a holy community as represented by a *minyan*), then “the Lord shall bring back Zion” and redeem Jerusalem. At that time Jews will “sing together” – sing together *Sanctus*!

And so it is, as we complete the daily recitations of the first two blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* in which we speak of God as bringing a redeemer, of healing the sick, supporting the fallen, releasing the bound, resurrecting the dead, and “causing salvation to sprout,” we dare dream of ourselves transformed and uplifted into a world redeemed. We dare think of ourselves existing in a time when Jews see eye-to-eye and answer each other’s call. And then we dare imagine that we join together with the angels in that holy and heavenly chorus, singing with them “*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*.” It is no accident, therefore, that as we recite *Kedushah* that we literally and figuratively transform ourselves from human to angels – standing with legs together as one and elevating ourselves three times on our feet, as if we too are *Seraphim* hovering around the Divine throne. And it is no accident, as well, that we end our *Kedushah* with the messianic promise of the Psalmist, “God shall reign forever, your God, Zion, from generation to generation, -Hallelujah” (*Tehillim* 146:10).

So open up your heart and let
This fool rush in.

Wise men say only fools rush in,
But I can’t help falling in love with you.
Shall I stay? Would it be a sin?
If I can’t help falling in love with you.