

Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

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This week, in the heart and center of the Torah, we read one of the most famous lines in Jewish tradition: “K’doshim Tihiyu” - You shall be holy, for I the Lord your G-d am holy. The essential question here is: what does it mean to be holy?

The truth is that the term “holiness,” kedusha, has multiple meanings and is somewhat difficult to define. To be holy is to be different, set apart, G-d like, caring, aware, and in relationship with G-d, ourselves and others all at the same time. Holiness necessitates community, as in our temple and is simultaneously very individualistic. In short, holiness is a multifaceted concept. And while defining holiness can be difficult, striving to actually live a life of holiness is even harder.

To live a life of holiness is to somehow walk through life with a sense of mindfulness and purpose that is in some way connected to G-d. That is why the verse ends with the phrase: “for I the Lord your G-d am holy.” But exactly how we do this is somewhat less clear.

In discussing our Torah verse, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Worka taught that striving to be holy:

Does not mean that one must attain the level of angels, something which is impossible. All that G-d demands is that man attain the level of holiness of which he is capable. Be holy, in whatever circumstances you find yourself, advance a little bit at a time in your holiness.

Judaism is not an all or nothing religion. As Jews we are taught to take things one step at a time, one mitzvah at a time, as we strive to grow in our beliefs and practices. At its core, holiness is about reaching our G-d given potential and striving to bring G-d’s presence into our world and into our lives one step at a time. Anyone can be holy at any

moment in time. Whether we are interacting with colleagues at work, family members at home, or strangers on a highway or in a restaurant, we can be holy.

One practical way to bring holiness into our daily life is to walk around with a heightened state of awareness of our surroundings, and a willingness to ask ourselves the following types of questions: How might I respond to this moment in a way that is holy and Godly? How might I respond in a way that is extraordinary instead of ordinary? What is one small thing that I can do to respond thoughtfully instead of automatically? Each of us has the ability to answer these questions. Each of us has the potential to discover the power within ourselves to be holy. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Worka reminds us that if we are willing to think big and take small steps, holiness is easily within our grasp.

May all of us have the courage, the patience, and the wisdom to pursue holiness one step at a time so that we might be privileged to discover G-d's blessings in our lives and in the world.

Shabbat Shalom