

Meshech Chochmah Parshas Beshalach

First Kedushah and Second Kedushah

עַד יַעֲבֹר עַמְּךָ ה' עַד יַעֲבֹר עִם זֶה קִנִּיתָ. תִּבְאֵמוּ וְתִטְעֵמוּ בְּהַר נַחֲלֹתֶיךָ מְכוּן לְשִׁבְתֶּיךָ
פְּעֻלֹת ה' מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנֵי יְדִידֶיךָ.

Until Your people passes through, Hashem; until this people You have acquired passes through. You will bring them and implant them in the mountain of Your heritage, the foundation of Your dwelling-place that You Hashem, have made, the Sanctuary, Hashem, that Your hands established. (15:16-17)

The Gemara in a number of places¹ discusses the *kedushah* that was instilled in the Land of Israel upon the arrival of Bnei Yisrael there. This occurred on two occasions:

- **The “First Arrival”** – in the time of Yehoshua, after leaving Mitzrayim.
- **The “Second Arrival”** – in the time of Ezra, after the Babylonian exile, inaugurating the building of the second Beis Hamikdash and the second commonwealth.

The opinion which is generally accepted as the halachah is that the first *kedushah* was not permanent, i.e., it expired when the Jewish people were exiled to Bavel, while the second *kedushah* remained intact even after the Romans destroyed the Beis Hamikdash and exiled the people – and remains still.²

What lies behind the different levels of permanence of these two *kedushos*?

Bas-Kohen and a Sefer Torah: The Greater the Kedushah...

The Meshech Chochmah offers a fascinating explanation of this matter³ based on a halachic concept relating to *kedushah*. The first illustration comes from the halachos of eligibility to eat *terumah* and *maaser*:

¹ See e.g. Megillah 11a, Chagigah 3b.

² See Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Beis Habechirah 6:16.

³ See Mishneh Torah loc. cit. for the Rambam’s own explanation of this matter.

1. The halachah states that a *bas-Levi* (daughter of a Levi) is entitled to eat *maaser*, while a *bas-Kohen* (daughter of a Kohen) is also entitled to eat *terumah*, in addition to being allowed to eat *maaser* – since every Kohen is also a Levi.
2. The Halachah further states that if a *bas-kohen* is involved in *znus* (forbidden relations) she forfeits her right to eat *terumah*, while a *bas-Levi* in a similar situation does not forfeit her right to eat *maaser*. The reason is that since the level of *kedushah* of *kehunah* is higher than that of *kedushah* of *leviah*, it is more susceptible to profanation.
3. However, the Gemara further states⁴ that if a *bas-kohen* has profaned her state of *kedushah*, she is no longer eligible to eat *maaser* either!

This final point teaches us that when there is a higher level of *kedushah* that is profaned, the result is a **total voiding** of *kedushah* – even of a lower level which itself would not have been profaned.

A similar example can be brought from the Gemara's discussion elsewhere regarding the *kedushah* of a sefer Torah.⁵ The parchment can be sanctified in one of two capacities:

- The area with writing on it has a higher level of *kedushah* (*kedushas ksav*).
- The blank parchment surrounding the letters has a lower level of *kedushah* (*kedushas klaf*).

The Gemara argues that if letters have been erased from a sefer Torah, the level of *kedushah* of the now blank parchment upon which they were written is lower than that of parchment that was blank to begin with! The idea here is the same. Since that area originally had letters on it and attained thereby the higher level of *kedushas ksav*, then should it subsequently lose that level, it becomes devoid of all *kedushah* – even the lower level of *kedushas klaf*.

The First and Second Beis Hamikdash

The above idea can be applied to the circumstances surrounding the two “arrivals” of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael. The level of *kedushah* surrounding our arrival in the days of Yehoshua was significantly higher than that which

⁴ See Bechoros 47a.

⁵ Shabbos 116a.

accompanied our arrival in the days of Ezra. The initial conquest of the land was accompanied by the holy *aron*, which then resided in the first Beis Hamikdash – but which was absent from the second. In fact, the Gemara⁶ goes so far as to list the *Shechinah* (Divine presence) as one of the things that was missing from the second Beis Hamikdash!

The consequences of this disparity are that, since the level of *kedushah* initiated by the first arrival was of such a high level, then when the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed and the *kedushah* profaned – it disappeared completely! In contrast, since the *kedushah* of the second arrival was of a lower level, it was not removed with the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash.

Foundations of the Third Beis Hamikdash

This idea had crucial implications for the future redemption. For if the *kedushah* of the second arrival was never removed, then it will endure throughout the exile and moreover, serve as the basis of the ultimate level of *kedushah* which will pertain in the times of the third Beis Hamikdash!

All of this, says Meshech Chochmah, is alluded to in our pesukim. The Gemara⁷ states that the two phrases “עַד יַעֲבֹר ... עַד יַעֲבֹר” refer to the two “arrivals” of Bnei Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael – the first and second commonwealths. We note that the first phrase contains Hashem’s name (“עַד יַעֲבֹר עִמָּךְ ה'”), while the second does not. This reflects the fact that the *Shechinah* was prominent in the first arrival, but not in the second.

However, the next pasuk proceeds to state that it is specifically due to the fact that the level of *kedushah* accompanying the second arrival was lower that it could be “planted” (וְתִטְעַמוּ) – i.e. instilled in a way which would remain embedded there permanently. Moreover, this *kedushah* would then serve as the “מְכוּן לְשִׁבְתְּךָ – foundation for Your dwelling place,” i.e. the third Beis Hamikdash which, as Rashi states,⁸ will descend from heaven fully fashioned by Hashem Himself – “מִקְדָּשׁ ה' כּוֹנֵנוּ יְדִידְךָ – the Sanctuary, Hashem, that Your hands established!”

⁶ Yoma 21b.

⁷ Berachos 4a.

⁸ Succah 41a.

Once again, the worlds of *halachah*, *machshavah* and *parshanut* come together in a harmonized whole in the teachings of R' Meir Simchah Hakohen.

A Wonder – To Behold!

מִי כְּמִכָּה בְּאֵלִים ה' מִי כְּמִכָּה נֶאֱדָר בְּקִדְּשׁ נִרְאָה תְּהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פֶּלֶא

Who is like You among the higher powers, Hashem, who is like You, garbed in holiness, too awesome for praise, Performer of wonder! (15:11)

The pasuk does not specify the exact nature of the “wonder” which Hashem performs. According to the Meshech Chochmah, the answer to this question is to be found in the Siddur.

In the *berachah* after the *maariv Shema*, we quote this pasuk and then say “מלכותך ראו בניך – Your children beheld Your kingship.” The common understanding of these words is that we are simply carrying on the theme of *kriyas Yam Suf* in between quoting selected pesukim from *Az Yashir*. However, the Meshech Chochmah says that these words are, in fact, an elucidation of the concluding words “עושה פלא” in the pasuk. In truth, Hashem is so exalted beyond human comprehension that it is ultimately impossible to grasp His essence, or even to meaningfully describe Him in terms of what He is, only in terms of what He isn't (e.g. physical, limited etc.). And yet, Hashem has provided a means to apprehend Him in some small measure by providing a glimpse into His kingship, nowhere more potently expressed than at the banks of the *Yam Suf*. Thus, the pasuk says:

- מִי כְּמִכָּה נֶאֱדָר בְּקִדְּשׁ – *Who is like You, garbed in Holiness*: The concept of קדושה – holiness, represents removal from physicality. No-one is removed from physicality more than Hashem.
- נִרְאָה תְּהִלַּת – *Too awesome to praise*: Hashem is so far removed from the physical realm that it is impossible even to praise Him with any positive attribute.
- עֲשֵׂה פֶּלֶא – *Performer of wonder*: with all this, Hashem performs a wonder.

And what is that wonder? The Siddur proceeds to provide the answer:

מלכותך ראו בניך – *Your children beheld Your kingship*: You provided Bnei Yisrael with the opportunity to experience and apprehend Your kingship at the *Yam Suf*, to the extent that they were able to say, in a limited but profoundly meaningful way: “זה אלי” – *This is my God*”!