



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Zack Morrow



Parshat Kedoshim is a very interesting *Parsha*. It has an incredibly diverse subject matter; we talk about things like proper weights and measures, *Molech* and Idolatry, and *Kashrus*. What is going on here? The entire *Parsha* switches from topic to topic, and the only unifying element is that at the end of certain sections it says, "*Ani Hashem Elokeichem*," "*I am G-d, your G-d*." Why is there this diversity and why is there this similarity? Taking a look at the beginning will clear things up a bit. We start out with Hashem telling Moshe to tell the Jewish people that they should be "*Kedoshim Tihyu*," "*Holy you shall be*" and those words are then followed up by *Ani Hashem Elokeichem*. Clearly there is a connection - that if we are to be holy to Hashem this is the way to do it. I think this is easier to picture in a math equation:

$$X + \textit{Ani Hashem Elokeichem} = \textit{Kedoshim Tihyu}$$

X = The *Mitzvah* or Commandment we are being told to do

Passuk 2: For I am Holy + *Ani Hashem Elokeichem* = *Kedoshim Tihyu*
Passuk 4: Do not turn to Idols + *Ani Hashem Elokeichem* = *Kedoshim Tihyu*
Passuk 10: Don't swear falsely + *Ani Hashem Elokeichem* = *Kedoshim Tihyu*

Clearly all of these laws are things to do that make our life *Kadosh*, which means to take the physical and make it a vehicle for the spiritual. All of these laws are how we do that. That brings up a problem for me. My personal opinions and ideas conflict heavily with the verse in 20:13. This verse states that "*If a man sleeps with another man in the ways of a woman, it is an abomination (To-ai'vah) they shall be put to Death, their blood is upon them.*" Now being that I'm from California and voted Democrat in the last election I'm sure many of you can see why I would have a problem with this verse. At the beginning of the year, I spent two months researching this and I could find absolutely nothing that would legitimize this *passuk* for me; that would tell me that homosexuality is not wrong according to the Torah. I tried **Rambam**; he says that they get stoned. **Rashi** merely explains the act, as do many other *Mefarshim*, and the *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin* deals with the issue of their punishment. In order to find out why this was I had to take a look into the word *To'aiva*, or abomination, and see why it was relevant here and what its typical context was in other places in the Torah.

We actually find it in a lot of places, typically it refers to *Avoda Zara* (Idolatry) and inappropriate relationships. When discussing the essence of *Avodah Zara* we see that it is all about the separating of the physical and spiritual, the exact opposite of

Kadosh. In our verse it is the same thing; the act has no outcome that is *Kadosh*, the act does not have an outcome the same way that a “normal” relationship between a man and a woman which theoretically would result in a child. This brings me to a big question, If the only reason that the act isn’t allowed is because a person isn’t being *Kadosh*, then why would we ostracize a member of a community if he would be found out to be gay? It has happened before, all over the United States, Israel, and even in the Old City! But why? We don’t spend every day immersed in making everything that we do *Kadosh*, so why do we have the right to cut out members of our community or make them feel bad for an obstacle that Hashem gave them. I have a friend who I went to school with in 5th grade. I hadn’t spoken to him in a couple years and thanks to the almighty Facebook, we found each other last year. We started talking online, and then started discussing what I was doing in Israel the next year, and what I believed about G-d and then finally settling on the topic of Judaism. After talking for awhile he said the he was no longer “religious” because of the way that his “religious” friends had acted when he had come out to them. He said that they said he absolutely wasn’t gay, and that it was not possible because the Torah says that it is a “*To-ai’va*.” That was also one of the last times they spoke to him.

I think when we read this *Parsha* we have to look at the entire thing, without taking the entire thing into consideration, we would misunderstand this *Parsha*. Let’s take a look at one *passuk*: 19:18, *You shall love your friend as Yourself*. If we have this *passuk*, then how can we possibly toss someone out of the community for this? If we can’t possibly be *Kadosh* all the time, and we don’t shun ourselves, then how can we possibly shun others. Unfortunately, I think a lot of us use the Torah to hide our prejudices, like using this *passuk* that says that homosexuality is an abomination, to hide our own homophobia. The Torah is telling us by putting “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” in this *Parsha* that even if a person does any of the things we are commanded not to in this *Parsha*, that we should still love them. I’m sure all of you are familiar with the story about Rabbi Hillel; A man walked into Hillel’s *Beit Midrash* and told Hillel that if he could teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot, that the man would become a religious Jew. “Of Course!” said Hillel. So the man pulled up his leg, and Hillel said “Love thy fellow man as yourself!” The man put down his foot and replied “That’s it?” To which Hillel said “Yes that is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary.” My 5th grade Rebbe was very fond of this he said he only had one rule in his class, Respect Everyone, if you do that, there is no need for other rules.

Now taking that back to the Torah, we clearly have other rules that we have to follow, but the constant undercurrent in our thought processes should always be to love our neighbor as ourselves. I can’t think of a better week for this *Parsha* to fall out on. On *Yom Hazikaron* (Memorial Day) hundreds if not thousands of people from all walks of life walked around Har Herzl honoring the lives of the countries sons and daughters buried there. And on *Yom Ha’atzma’ut* (Independence Day) as I walked through *Gan* (Park) *Ha’atzma’ut* I saw a number of *Daati* (religious), and *Chiloni* (secular) families having their *mongalim* (BBQ’s), and getting together with their family for a great day in the park. Now no matter what their political and theological differences they can still all be together for a day as important as *Yom Ha’atzma’ut*. With the idea to love everyone as we do ourselves in our minds, think about the good we can do, creating complete harmony in our communities, bridging the gaps between the different kinds of Judaism, and finally *Tikun Olam*, Fixing the World.

Zach graduated from the Morrison Prep High School in Los Angeles. He was on the NCSY Valley Student Board and won the 2008 OU Youth Leadership Award for the West Coast Region. Zack is a black belt and instructor in the Tang Su Do Discipline as well as a very talented Chef.

Zach's favourite part about Orayta is: "Rav Binny's Thursday night Learning Program. The Q & A and Kumsitz promotes a feeling of achdut (unity) amongst the guys. And it feels like the right way to get ready for Shabbat."