

Kidushim: The Holiness Code

Yom Kippur Mincha Service

September 18, 2010 / 10 Tishri 5771

By tova stabin

Gut Yuntiff and thank you for the honor of having me briefly speak and thanks to all the people who work hard so that we can have this spiritual experience together.

This torah chapter of Leviticus, chapter 19, called *Kidushim*, is often referred to as the “holiness code,” – a brief on how to be holy. It begins with “G-d,” however you envision that, telling Moses that he should speak to the entire community about how to be holy. These are not codes for leaders or the priests of the day, but for everyone – for each one of us can be holy. And we are to hear these laws communally, for we are a communal people, and we can bear witness communally to each other well on this day – for, after all, today is a time when a lot of people show up here!

These “codes” are moral and ethical laws - many of which talk about justice and sensitivity in treating others – about loving the stranger, consideration for the poor, not making laborers wait for their pay. And, I would feel personally neglectful not to mention here, that many congregations read instead Leviticus 18 today, which some use as an invective against the lesbian/gay/ bisexual/ transgendered community, so let me specifically include that community for our consideration and respect. These codes not only deal with actions, but also about motives – we hear not only “you shall not steal...” but also “you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another” and “you shall not defraud.”

Ironically, the root of the word holy – *kadosh* – comes from the root *kuf-dalet-shin*, meaning set apart, but the holiness codes are about relationships, and perhaps even more ironic, most of them are about relationships between people, not between people and G-d, as one might suspect especially on a day when the gates are open for us to commune most urgently with “God,” and our spiritual selves.

How can we interpret these rules and regulations today on the holy Shabbat of Shabbats, Yom Kippur, at the *mincha* service when, so it is said, the gates to heaven are still open, but we will soon move to the *Ne'ila* service – which means the closing of the gates. Why on a day when we are seen as closest to the spiritual world, wearing white like the angels, and the gates between heaven and earth, life and death, are open and fluid – Why are we told, reminded each year, that what is holy, what is closest to “G-d,” is about our relationships with each other, with people. Indeed, in this chapter of Leviticus is the verse that Hillel said summed up the entire Torah and Rabbi Akiba declared to be the great principal of the Torah, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Why this seeming contradiction? Perhaps, we are to be reminded, that even on the day when we make our deepest pleas to “God”, to the spiritual world, when the gates are open, that perhaps on the holiest of holy days when we are striving towards holiness, we are to be reminded that our holiness is not about one special day, but about how we relate

to and between each other, how we are ethical in our daily lives. And as we prepare for the *Ne'ila*, the closing of the gates, we are not closing the gates to holiness, but with the last blast of the shofars ringing in our ears to end Yom Kippur, it is not an ending, but a call to a beginning, a beginning of the important and essential, perhaps quintessential, task of the holiness of everyday with every person of every type and kind. Let us love ALL of our neighbors in these sometimes challenging times, making each and every day and each and every one of us holy. Gut yuntiff.