

This week's text is from one of Rav Yehonatan Eyebeschuetz's Torah commentaries, Tif'eret Yehonatan, distinguished from Divrei Yehonatan. The controversy about Rav Eyebeschuetz is well-known, and I do not presume to add anything to Professor Leiman's various treatments of the subject. So I will deliberately refrain from any attempt at contextualizing this paragraph within my (very limited) knowledge of Rav Eyebeschuetz's thought, and instead treat its ideas within a broader intellectual framework. I should mention that I found this paragraph some years ago in Nechamah Liebowitz z"l's New Studies in Vayikra, Kedoshim 1, but that the translation in the English version seems to me problematic.

The first underlying exegetical issue in the text is how human beings can be tasked with being holy (kedoshim tihyu) because G-d is holy (ki kadosh), and thus apparently to be holy in the same way that G-d is holy, when the holiness of G-d means precisely that He is so separate from us as to be inimitable. The cited midrashic solution is that the verse acknowledges the inevitable gap between human and Divine holiness by adding the seemingly extraneous word "Ani". Rav Eyebeschuetz explains the gap as follows: G-d has three levels of holiness (kadosh, kadosh, kadosh), and human beings can only imitate the first two. The third level of holiness is utter simplicity (separation from compositeness), whereas human beings are irredeemably composite/compound.

A second exegetical issue then comes into play, namely that Mosheh is told to utter this verse to the entire community, "kol adat benei Yisroel", the same phrase used in Shemot 35 to describe Hakhel. Rav Eyebeschuetz cleverly argues that the point being made here is that human holiness requires a composite, the collective of the nation, as opposed to Divine holiness. On this basis he explains the requirement for a symbol of the collective, or minyan, for devarim shebikedushah, or matters of holiness.

At this point Rav Eyebeschuetz cites Ramban's famous understanding of the imperative to "be holy" as requiring us to go beyond the formal requirements of law, to "sanctify ourselves within the permitted" by avoiding actions that are within the letter of the Law but against the spirit of holiness. The spirit of holiness is defined in contrast to ethics (Ramban derives an obligation to avoid technically legal actions that violate the spirit of ethics from "va'asitem hayashar vehatov") as separation from the physical, e.g. excessive marital sex or eating or scatological or pornographic language. He does not disagree with Ramban, but rather opposes the possible implication of Ramban that each person should strive for asceticism to the extent of their own capacities. Rav Eyebeschuetz instead says that one should only act toward holiness in a manner which would be sustainable if universalized. Here he cites the phrase "Torah im derekh eretz" to allude to the controversy between R. Yishmael and R. Shimon bar Yochai as to whether one should encourage people to spend their time in Torah study and trust that G-d will provide. The Talmud records that "many tried the way of R. Shimon bar Yochai and failed", and R. Eyebeschuetz apparently understands this as meaning not just that it is an unfair expectation for the masses, but that it is an inappropriate aspiration for the elite. Thus Ramban's interpretation stands, but with a caution that one must not seek, for example, to limit one's own marital intimacy, or eating, to a level below that which an ordinary person would deem necessary for his/her physical and psychological health, regardless of one's own ascetic capacities..

The practical utility of this reading are open to question, as they require the aspiring ascetic to have a deep sense not only of their own limits, but also those of ordinary people, when ascetics are more likely to believe that everyone could reach their level with sufficient effort. I am nonetheless fascinated by what seems to be a parallel in the realm of holiness to Kant's notion that an action can be ethical only if it is universalizable; I wonder if Rav Eyebeschuetz would set the same limit on going lifnim mishurat hadin (beyond the line of the Law) in the context of ethics. I also would love to hear whether you share the notion that "holy" actions need to be universalizable, such that we have no room in our culture for saints; an alternate model would be to support substantive spiritual diversity. It seems to me that Maimonides' distinction between the chakham, who follows the Golden Mean, and the chasid, who tends to one extreme, supports that alternative. Your comments are as always eagerly anticipated. Shabbat shalom!

תפארת יהונתן פרשת קדושים

איתא במדרש: "קדושים תהיו" – יכול כמוני? ת"ל 'אני ה' – קדושתו למעלה".
והענין היא: כי כבר נאמר במדרש: "שני קדושות נמסרו לישראל",
וכמו שכתב הפייט "שתים בראש בני משכנים, ואחד בראש מלכם מתוקנים",
והיינו כי 'קדוש' ענינו הוא 'מובדל', ויש בן שלש בחינות:
מובדל מחטא, וזהו ג"כ בישראל צדיקים גמורים,
וגם קדוש ענינו משנה הטבע, וזהו ג"כ בצדיקים שיכולים לשנות הטבע ולעשות ניסים,
אבל עיקר ענין קדושה הוא נבדל מהרכבה, שאין בו הרכבה כלל, וקדושה זה הוא רק בהשם יתברך, כי אפילו
מלאכי השרת מורכבים המה.
וזהו שני הכתרים שניתנו לישראל במתן תורה,
כי אז נעקר מהם היצר הרע והיו קדושים ומובדלים מחטא
וגם היה בידם לעשות ניסים כשאר נביאים, כי היו למעלה מהטבע,
וזה שתי קדושות אבק קדושות הקב"ה נשגב מזה, וז"ש "יכול כמוני? ת"ל 'אני ה' – קדושתו למעלה".
אמנם נראה כי ודאי ישראל קדושים הם, אבל צריך כנישתא, שאין דבר שבקדושה פחות מ'. . .
וזהו מ"ש במדרש: והביאו רש"י, ש"פרשה זו נאמרה בהקהל", הרצון שאין הקדושה ביחיד רק בקהל, שהוא
עשרה . . .
והנה הרמב"ן האריך בדרשת "קדושים תהיו" – קדש עצמך במותר לך".
אמנם, כבר פרשתי בזה כי להחמיר יותר מחק התורה הוא אפשרות רחוקה,
כי כבר כתב יוסיפון בן גוריון בספרו לרומים שהיו בבית שני אנשים שהיו בבית שני אנשים שהיו שוכנים
ביערים מתבודדים וממש לא אכלו רק פרי עצי היער והיו נזירים מכל עניני עולם וכדומה, עד שהיו ממש
נבדלים מעניני עולם, אבל הפרושים לא נחו דעתם בהם כלל וכלל,
כי העובד ה' השלם צריך להיות דבריו ועסקיו נוח לשמים ולבריות, ולא להפריע נימוס ישוב העולם וחברת
בני אדם והנהגת מדיני,
ואלו היו כולם נזירים כהנה, לא נתקיים נימוס וסדר הטבע וכמעט יכלה העולם ויאבד קשר האומה ושאריתו
בארץ כפי הטבע,
וע"ז רמזו חז"ל "יפה תורה עם דרך ארץ",
ולכן כל הפרישות שיעשה האדם נכון להיות על זה הסוג, שיש בו אפשרות שיתקיים אותו כל האומה ולא
יקרה בו ביטול,
אבל הפרישות שאי אפשר רק ליחיד, ולא לאומה בכללה, זה אינו בגדר השלימות והפרישות, ודברים כאלה
הרחיקו חכמי ישראל,
וזהו כוונת המדרש "פרשה זה נאמרה בהקהל", והיינו כמ"ש כי 'הקדושה במותר לך' יהיה מה ששייך בקהל.

We find in the midrash: “You must be holy” – This could have been misunderstood to mean ‘as holy as Me’, so Scripture teaches ‘I am Hashem’ – My holiness is above (yours).
The intent is this: The Midrash has said that “Two holinesses were given over to Israel”,
as the paytan writes: “Two on the head of my son dwelling, and one on the head of their King established¹”

which means that the intent of “holy” is “separated”, and it contains three classifications: separated from sin, which also applies to Jews who are perfectly righteous, and “holy” also means “capable of altering the natural order”, which also applies to the righteous, who are capable of altering the natural order and performing miracles, but the root meaning of “holiness” is “separated from compositeness”, that He has no compositeness at all, and this form of Holiness applies only to Hashem may He be blessed, for even the ministering angels are composite.

The first two are the crowns that were given to the Jews at the Giving of Torah, Because then the yetzer hara was uprooted from them and they were “sanctified” and separated from sin, and they also were capable of doing miracles, like other prophets, because they were above the natural order.

These two types of holiness are the “dust” of the more exalted holiness of The Holy One Who is Blessed, which is the meaning of “This could have been misunderstood to mean ‘as holy as Me’, so Scripture teaches ‘I am Hashem’ – My holiness is above (yours).”

But it seems that while Jews are certainly holy, that holiness requires a gathering, for “there is no matter of holiness that does not require ten” . . .

This is what is meant by what is written in the midrash, cited by Rashi, that “this unit of Torah was said with the community gathered”, the intent being that the holiness applies not while individual but rather in community, which means ten . . .

Now Ramban expounded at length on the interpretation “You must be holy” - sanctify yourself in that which is permitted to you (by abstaining from it”).

However, I have already explained regarding this that to be more stringent than the law of the Torah is a distant possibility,

as Josippon ben Gurion already wrote in his book for the Romans² that during the Second Temple there were men who would dwell in the forests in isolation, and literally ate nothing but fruits of the forest and withheld themselves from all matters of the world and the like, to the point that they were literally separated from matters of the world, but the Perushim were not at all pleased about this,

because the complete servant of Hashem must make his matters and activities pleasing to Heaven and to people, and not obstruct the *nomos* of settling the world and human society and political administration,

whereas if everyone were withheld like those, the *nomos* would not endure, nor the natural order, and it would nearly be that the world would end and the national bond and physical survival on the earth would be lost in accordance with the natural order.

Chazal hint at this when they say “Best is Torah with *Derekh Eretz*”.

Therefore any abstinence that a person does properly fall within this class, that they have the possibility for an entire nation to fulfill it without nullifying itself,

but an abstinence that is possible only for an individual, and not to the nation in its entirety, is not within the confines of completion and praiseworthy abstinence, and such matters were distanced by the Sages of Israel.

This is the intent of the midrash “This unit of Torah was said with the community gathered”, meaning as I wrote above that the “sanctification within what is permitted to you” must be something that is appropriate for the community . . .

¹ My translation of this quote is highly uncertain

² I am not clear on the Josippon/Josephus intellectual history – it seems to me most likely that R. Eyebeschuetz does not distinguish between them, but that is a guess