



- 2 *Speak to the entire community of the Children of Israel and say to them: Be holy, for I, God, your God, am holy.*
- ב דְבַר אֶל-כָּל-עֵדַת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל  
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תְּהִיוּ כִּי  
קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

stone of all social morality. Note that the **אם**, the mother, is mentioned first. For only if a man chooses the right wife in a Divinely sanctioned marriage will the children have a true mother (**אם**) — the very first condition (**אם**) for all moral and spiritual humanness. Only such conditions can produce the uniquely Jewish relationship of children to their parents, a relationship that in turn creates a family life in which children are taught to fulfill their obligations toward God and man.

That is also why the social commandments introduced in this chapter enjoin primarily traits of character. They train a person to be sincere and upright, brotherly and forgiving, and they base the life of the society on love of neighbor.

These virtues cannot be enforced by state power. Failure to practice them will not be penalized by any human court. Their prevalence in a society depends solely on the character of its members. If anything, the effects of observance or non-observance of the **ערויות** laws are discernible in the traits of offspring; for the initial formation of their character — for good or for bad — is influenced by the observance or non observance of these laws.

- 2 **דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל**. We find a similar formula only in the case of the first mitzvah given to Israel — the Pesach offering (*Shemos* 12:3). Moshe and Aharon are explicitly told there to declare this mitzvah to the *whole* community. We do not find this at any other mitzvah — except here.

The mitzvah of **קדשים תהיו** is a command to strive for the highest degree of human moral perfection (cf. Commentary, *Bereshis* 2:3); and rightfully it should be addressed expressly to each individual. Every person — regardless of status or sex, age or lot — is summoned to attain the highest moral level. There is no one individual to whom this call is specially addressed. We must all be **קדושים**, holy.

**קדושה** — to be ready and willing to perform all that is good; a person

cannot attain this virtue unless his whole being is so steeped in morality that the opposite of the good, viz., the inclination to evil, no longer has a place within his being. The statement by our Sages in *Toras Kohanim* — קדושים תהיו means קדושים תהיו — underscores this negative aspect of קדושה. It also points out the way that leads to קדושה; for much work is required of anyone seeking to attain the heights of קדושה. קדושה is attained through mastery over all of one's powers and faculties and over all the temptations and inclinations associated with them — to be ready and willing to do God's Will.

Self-mastery is the highest art a man can practice. Self-mastery does not mean neglecting, stunting, killing, or destroying any of one's powers or faculties. In and of themselves, the powers and faculties — from the most spiritual to the most sensual — that have been given to man are neither good nor bad. They all have been given to us for exalted purposes — that we may use them to do God's Will on earth. The Torah sets for each of them a positive purpose and negative limits. In the service of that purpose and within those limits, all is holy and good. But where a person strays from that purpose and exceeds those limits, coarseness and evil begin.

As in any other art, virtuosity in this, the highest moral art can be attained only through practice — training one's moral willpower to master the inclinations of the heart. But this training is not to be undertaken in the realm of the expressly forbidden, where any slip would result in wrongdoing. Rather, moral resolve must be tested and strengthened in the realm of the permitted. By learning to overcome inclinations that are permitted but related to the forbidden, one gains the power of self-mastery and thus makes all his powers and faculties subservient to the fulfillment of God's Will. Each person, according to his own unique qualities, should work on his inner self; and he should train *quietly*, in a manner *known only to himself*.

This is the training regimen that our Sages call פרישות, abstinence, which the Gemara in *Yevamos* 20a formulates: קדש עצמך במותר לך, “Sanctify yourself in the realm of what is permitted you.” פרישות is not yet קדושה, but it is a preliminary step toward it, as ר' פינחס בן יאיר teaches in his “ascending steps” toward moral perfection (see *Avodah Zarah* 20b).

קדוש אני ה' כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם. You *can* and *must* be holy *because* ה' קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם — because I, Who am אלקיכם, ה', am קדוש. The קדושה to which you

- 3 You must each revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths; I am God, your God.
- ג אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת־  
שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

must aspire is, in its absolute true sense, an attribute of My essence; and, as ה', I have breathed into you of My breath and endowed you with a share of My freedom, and I continually strengthen you and assist you to do what is good. Because קדוש אני ה' you are *able* to attain קדושה. What is more, קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם; I, Who give you this ability for קדושה, am also אלקיכם; I direct your fate and wish to guide your actions; I command you to attain קדושה, and I hinge your fate on your fulfillment of this duty. Because קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם, you are *commanded* to attain קדושה.

*Toras Kohanim's* interpretation of our verse goes even further: קדושים קדוהיו וגו' לומר אם מקדישים אתם עצמכם מעלה אני עליכם כאלו קדשתם אותי. That is to say, because I am your God — because you call Me “our God” and I call you “My people” — the holiness of My Name among mankind depends on the holiness of your actions. Through your holiness My Name will be sanctified among the nations. אבא שאול אומר פמליא למלך ומה (עליה להיות מְחֻקָּה למלך) (*Toras Kohanim*). That is to say, you are close to God and are called the entourage of the King; hence, not only must you not be contrary to My holiness, but the holiness of My Name must be impressed and engraved upon your character (מחקה as in the verse מְחֻקָּה עַל־הַקִּיר [Yechezkel 8:10]).

Verses 2, 3, 4, 10, 25, 31, 34, and 36 conclude with the words אני ה' אלקיכם; this divides the chapter into distinct groups. In the groups comprising verses 11–25 and verses 26–31 there are several verses that conclude with the words אני ה'; this subdivides these groups into separate paragraphs.

The pillars of our sanctification consist of three basic principles: (a) parents and Sabbath (v. 3); (b) the purity of our conception of God (v. 4); and (c) the purity and social productivity of our relationship with God (vv. 5–10).

- 3 אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ. Revering mother and father and sanctifying Shabbos educate the Jew to the holiness of life — from the day he is born

to the day he dies. **יראה את אב ואם** is the first step toward **קדושה**. This **יראה** is not **יראה מפני**, fear of, the parents — which would have led to the conclusion that one is bound by this duty only when he is in the *presence* of his parents. Rather, **אמו ואביו** are the objects of **תיראו את-**. **יראה את-** denotes that we must be ever mindful of our parents and of our obligation to fulfill their wishes (**ירא** is the intellectual equivalent of **קרא**; it is *calling to mind* someone and evoking his presence — see Commentary, *Bereshis* 2:19). The essence of **יראה** is obedience: subordinating one's will to the will of the one to whom **יראה** is directed.

In our Commentary on the mitzvah of **כיבוד אב ואם** in the Ten Commandments (*Shemos* 20:12) we analyzed the significance of parents, the significance that gives them their prominent place in the Torah. Parents convey to their children not only physical existence, but also the Jewish mission. They transmit to the next generation Jewish history and Torah from Heaven's hand. Hence, it is not the good that parents do for their children, but the mission given to the parents concerning their children that is the basis of the mitzvah of **כיבוד אב ואם**. He who honors his father and his mother honors God and His revelation in history and in the Torah.

Here, in the chapter on **קדושה**, the duty to obey parents is emphasized. Subordination of the child's will to the parents' will, nullification of the child's will because of his parents' will, is the first training toward self-control. Self-control will release the young person from the fetters of his baser instincts and give him mastery over the impulses of his will; it will free the Divine forces in man and lead him to moral freedom. This constitutes the whole essence of the character of the **קדוש**.

The mitzvah of Shabbos — **ואת שבתתי תשמרו** — is placed together in the same sentence with the mitzvah of **כיבוד אב ואם**. From this we derive the sole limitation placed on the duty of obeying one's parents. As *Toras Kohanim* infers: **יכול אמר לו אביו ואמו לעבור על אחת מכל המצוות האמורות בתורה**. **ישמע להם, ת"ל ואת שבתותי תשמרו, כולכם חייבין בכבודי**. “You might have thought that if your parents tell you to violate any of the Torah's commandments, you must obey them. Scripture therefore states: ‘and keep My Sabbaths’; all of you, parents and children alike, are obligated to honor Me.” Parents have been appointed to be emissaries of God's Will, and for this purpose alone has authority been invested in their will. Naturally, then, the parents' will must retreat before God's Will.

**שבת** is employed here as an example of the entire Torah; for **שבת** is

- 4 *Do not turn to the gods that deny, and do not make yourselves molten deities; I, God, am your God.* ד אֶל-תִּפְנוּ אֱלֹהֵי-הָאֱלִילִים וְאֱלֹהֵי מִסְכָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

the source and basis of the whole Jewish mission, and is an everlasting sign of the dominion of God's Will over all our activities in the natural and social spheres. When a Jewish child sees his parents keeping Shabbos, from their example he learns to place his world at God's feet; and obedience to parents leads to obedience to God. *אב כיבוד* is a living "Shabbos" for the children, and Shabbos is a father and mother to all. Both educate the Jew to God.

Here, Scripture does not say *תירא* and *תשמור*, in the singular — as in the Ten Commandments — but *תיראו* and *תשמרו*. Not only individuals are to fulfill these two fundamentals of Jewish morality; rather, *אב כיבוד* and *אם שבת* are to leave their imprint on the whole Jewish national character. Because of them, God becomes our God; through them, our homage to God is made manifest. They are the two pillars of the holiness of Jewish life. As long as these pillars are in place, there is a basis for our very relationship to God — and God says of us: *אני ה' אלקיכם*. Experience, too, teaches us that when one of these two pillars falls, the other falls also.

- 4 *אל תפנו אל האלילים*. *לא* and *אל* differ in their meaning. *לא* derives from the root *לאה*, which means to be tired, helpless, powerless. *לא*, then, denotes negation generally — even negation of being. By contrast, *אל* — from the root *אלל* — denotes only the negation of what one wishes or ought to do (cf. Commentary, *Bereshis* 47:13 and *Shemos* 7:18). Hence, *אל* is never used in conjunction with the past or present tense. *אלל*, then, denotes the concept of refusal, denial; thus *אללי*, an exclamation of pain over aspirations whose fulfillment has been denied. So we find in the verse *אם-רשעתי אללי לי* (*Iyov* 10:15) — literally: If I have transgressed against God's Will, I cannot expect that my wishes will be fulfilled; rather, I will be denied the fulfillment of my aspirations.

Now, *אלילים* are powers that deny. This amounts to the heathen conception of god; for the gods are powers that are hostile to man and