

# Minimalizing the Animalistic Drive

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## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Kedoshim

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### Orientation for Spiritual Ascension

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1. There is a positive Commandment to be holy.
2. Rashi: Separating oneself from forbidden sexual relationships causes sanctity.
3. Ramban: Sanctity-weaning oneself from what is permitted.
4. Hedonism: The antithesis of holiness.
5. G-d wants the Jew to be holy because He is holy.
6. G-d has no relevance to the material; The Jew engages in the material at a minimum.
7. The physicality of man is not inclined to the spiritual.
8. The Torah first delineates the kosher and non-kosher species, and then what is an abomination
9. First sanctify the vessel (the body) to function in spiritual arena (performing Mitzvos).
10. Psalms: The prerequisite to wisdom is fear of G-d.
11. Submitting to the will of G-d, one actualizes a relationship with G-d through Torah and Mitzvos.

### Establishing a Benchmark of Absolute Truth

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1. A Jew is not permitted to turn towards idolatry.
2. Rambam: It is not only forbidden to read about the rituals of idolatry, one is not permitted to gaze upon an idol.
3. Any thought that may cause one to reject any of the fundamentals of Torah is forbidden.
4. Man's intellect is limited; he cannot grasp truth on an absolute level.
5. Permitted to veer after the reflections of his heart he would destroy the world.
6. Not having a concrete irrefutable position he would vacillate in his belief.
7. At Sinai, G-d openly communicated with every Jew.
8. They witnessed G-d speaking to Moshe and transmitting to the Jews, so establishing him as His prophet.
9. Moshe's prophecy is thus unquestioned.
10. Sinai is the reference point for the the Jew; no reason for the Jew to reflect on the truthfulness of these issues.

### Is There Inequity in G-d's Justice?

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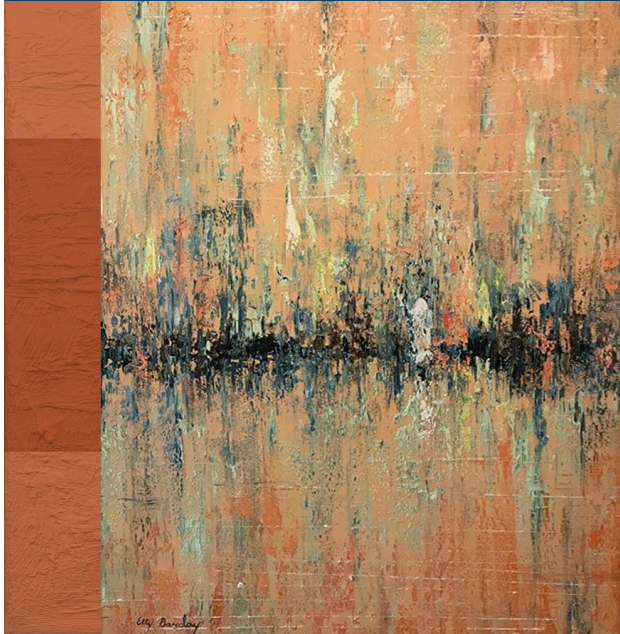


### Parsha Upfront: An Indicator Of Aberrant Behavior

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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Kedoshim



# Minimalizing the Animalistic Drive

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### What is Needed to Merit G-d's Assistance

The *Torah* states, "You shall be holy..." The *Midrash* cites a verse from Psalms, " 'May He dispatch your help from holiness and from Zion shall you be supported.' What is the meaning of 'May He dispatch your help from holiness?' As a result of the sanctity of one's actions he will merit Divine Assistance. What is the meaning of 'and from Zion shall you be supported?' Based on how meticulously and perfectly one performs the *mitzvos*, one will merit a greater degree of Assistance. Thus, Divine Assistance emanates from the degree of sanctity of one's actions as well as how perfectly one performs the *mitzvos*."

*Ramchal* writes in his work *Knowing Heart (Daas Tvunos)* two individuals of identical *Torah* proficiency may perform the same *mitzvah* with the same level of meticulousness, G-d will value their *mitzvos* based on the dimension of each individual's holiness/sanctity.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Sukkah* tells us that *Hillel* the elder had eighty students. *Reb Yonasan Ben Uziel* was of the greatest of his students and *Reb Yochanan Ben Zakai* was of the lesser of his students. However, they were all equally proficient in every aspect of *Torah*. The *Gemara* asks, "If this is so, then why is *Reb Yonasan Ben Uziel* classified as being greater than *Reb Yochanan Ben Zakai*?"

The *Gemara* answers that when *Reb Yonasan Ben Uziel* would engage in *Torah* study, the birds over his head would be consumed by the fire of his holiness. This was not the case with *Reb Yochanan Ben Zakai*. *Ramchal* explains that because of the dimension of holiness of *Reb Yonasan Ben Uziel*, his service of G-d/performance of *mitzvos* was valued to a greater degree. The basis for evaluating the performance of a *mitzvah* is not only determined by how perfectly it was executed, but it is also determined by the inherent holiness of the individual who is performing it.

In the *Ashrei* Psalm, King David writes, "G-d is close to all who call upon Him- to all who call upon Him with sincerity (*b'emmes*).” Simply, one understands this to mean that G-d is close to those who call out to Him wholeheartedly. However, this verse can also be understood to mean, "G-d is close to those who approach Him with truth.” King Solomon in Proverbs quantifies the *Torah* as the essence of "truth" as he states, "Acquire truth and do not sell it." G-d responds to the one who possesses *Torah*/truth because of the dimension of the person who possesses it. When one possesses the truth of *Torah*, he assumes a unique level of sanctity/holiness.

The *Mishna* in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that initially there was a classification of individuals who were referred to as "*Chasidim rishonim* (the scrupulously pious of special renown)" These individuals would prepare themselves for one hour before reciting the *Amidah* (silent prayer). Their recitation of the *Amidah* took another hour. After they completed the *Amidah* they would reflect upon their experience for another hour. Since one is obligated to recite the *Amidah* three times a day, this unique class of individuals were involved in this process for nine hours a day.

The *Gemara* asks, if they had devoted nine hours a day for their prayers alone (and they also needed to engage in other mundane activities that were necessities), what degree of time remained in the day for their *Torah* study? They also needed to earn a livelihood. What degree of time remained for that pursuit? The *Gemara* answers that since they were "*Chasidim rishonim*" they were able to retain all the *Torah* that they studied without the need to review. In addition, G-d provided them with a livelihood with a minimal degree of initiative.

The *Torah*, being the most holy entity in existence must be contained in a vessel that has relevance to its holiness. These individuals, because of their exceptional dimension of holiness, were able to retain the *Torah* without any difficulty. However, if one does not possess a sufficient level of sanctity, without reviewing one's study, the *Torah* will ultimately dissipate and be forgotten. As the *Midrash* states, there are two components that are necessary to merit Divine Assistance. One, being the sanctity in which the *mitzvah* is being performed and secondly, the level of perfection that one performs the *mitzvah*.

## **G-d Demonstrates His Dominion Through Judgment**

The *Torah* states, "You shall be holy..." The *Midrash* cites a verse from the Prophet *Yishaya*, " 'G-d was exalted through judgment...' How was G-d exalted through judgment? G-d becomes exalted in existence when He judges the nations of the world. As the verse states, 'G-d establishes Himself for battle and He stands to judge the nations...' The verse continues, '...The Holy G-d will be sanctified through His righteousness/charity...' What is the charity that G-d will do?

At the end of time when G-d will judge the Jewish people, He will do so favorably despite their shortcomings. This is the meaning of 'G-d will be sanctified through His charity.' G-d will be the advocate of the Jewish people and He will speak abundantly on their behalf to bring about their salvation. G-d said to the Jewish people, 'At the end of time I will be sanctified through you.' By demonstrating His Attribute of Kindness, as being the advocate of the Jewish people, G-d will be sanctified...G-d said to them, 'And therefore you must be sanctified through Me.'"

It is interesting to note that on *Rosh Hashanah*, the Day of Judgment, when we conclude the blessing of the holiness of G-d's Name we insert the verse from *Yishaya* "G-d, Master of Legions will be exalted in judgment, and the holy G-d will be sanctified in righteousness/charity." The blessing concludes, "G-d, the holy King."

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah* tells us that on *Rosh Hashanah*, the entire world stands in judgment before G-d. Not only are the Jewish people judged on that day, but also the nations of the world. When G-d institutes judgment on the world, He is exalted. In addition, G-d is sanctified through His righteousness because He acts as the advocate of the Jewish people. Despite the intensity of the prosecution, G-d demonstrates His Mastership by deflecting the prosecution, as the advocate of the Jewish people. Thus, G-d is sanctified through bringing about a favorable judgment on behalf of the Jewish people.

*Chofetz Chaim* in his work, *Loving Kindness (Ahavas Chesed)*, cites sources that state that most times, judgment is adjudicated through the Heavenly Court, with G-d presiding over it. However, there are times when G-d Himself adjudicates the case of an individual without the participation of the Heavenly Court.

On *Rosh Hashanah* the day of judgment, regarding the predicament of the Jewish people, G-d Himself intervenes on their behalf as the Holy King. Despite the level of prosecution against the Jewish people, He acts as their advocate.

At the end of time, G-d will be acknowledged by all humanity as the Supreme King. It is at that time that He will judge all the nations of the world and they will be condemned. However, He will demonstrate His righteousness/charity to the Jewish people by judging them favorably. By acting as their advocate at the end of time, despite their failings, G-d will be sanctified and recognized as the Master of all existence.

## Yaakov's Uniqueness

The *Midrash* states, "G-d said to the Jewish people, 'Before I Created the world, the angels would praise Me through you. They would sanctify My Name with you.' What would they say? 'Blessed is G-d who is the G-d of Israel from this world to the world (referring to the world to come).' When *Adam* came into existence the angels asked G-d, 'When we bless You as the G-d of Israel, is this the one to whom we are referring?' G-d responded, 'No, it is not. He is a thief. I had commanded him not to eat from the Tree, yet he ate.' When *Noach* came into existence the angels asked, 'Is this the one to whom we are referring?' G-d responded, 'No, it is not. He is a drunkard. As it states, 'He drank from the wine and became drunk...'"

When *Avraham* came into being the angels asked, 'Is this the one to whom we are referring?' G-d responded, 'No, it is not. He is a gentile. This is because he fathered *Ishmael* (who was not born from a matriarch).' When *Yitzchak* was born the angels asked, 'Is this the one?' G-d responded, 'No, it is not. He loved My enemy. *Yitzchak* loved his son *Esav*, who was evil and against Me.' When *Yaakov* was born the angels asked, 'Is this the one?' G-d responded, 'Yes, it is he.'

When you praise Me as the G-d of Israel, this is the one to whom you are referring. In addition, the entire Jewish people will assume his name- as they are known as 'the Children of Israel (*b'nei Yisroel*). G-d sanctified the Jewish people with the name of Israel (*Yaakov*), saying, 'I will be glorified through you. Since you have been sanctified through this name, even before the creation of the world, you must be holy because I am holy.'"

The Torah tells us that after *Yaakov* wrestled with the archangel of *Esav*, G-d changed his name to "Israel." The name "Israel" signifies his dimension of mastership. Meaning, "he had lorded over man (*Esav* and *Lavan*) and G-d (the archangel)." The *Torah* states, "(*Yaakov* had communicated to his brother *Esav*) "...I have sojourned with *Lavan* and lingered until now – *im Lavan gartie*." *Rashi* explains that the word "*gartie*" is numerically the equivalent of "*taryag*," the 613 *mitzvos* of the *Torah*. *Yaakov* was communicating to *Esav* that although he had lived for a period of twenty years in the home of his evil father-in-law, *Lavan*, his spirituality had not been diminished as much as an iota. Although he was in an environment that was the antithesis of spirituality, he remained spiritually unscathed. Israel is the one who dominates and is not dominated because of his dimension of spirituality. When *Yaakov* defeated the archangel of *Esav* he demonstrated that not only does he remain unaffected by the material, he also dominates the spiritual.

Every one of *Yaakov's* predecessors had failed in some manner. *Adam* had eaten from the *Tree*. *Noach* had become drunk. *Avraham* fathered *Ishmael* from *Hagar*. Although *Yitzchak*, as a Patriarch was uniquely spiritual, his love for his son *Esav* interfered with his ability to perceive the true evil of his son. *Yaakov*, who *Chazal* tell us was the most special of the Patriarchs, had attained a level of perfection that did not exist before him. He was the first human being to affect/dominate existence and not be dominated by it. This is a characteristic which is common to G-d Himself, who affects without being affected. This is the reason G-d identifies Himself as "the G-d of Israel."

G-d had said to the Jewish people that they must live a life of sanctity because they had been sanctified before existence. How should the Jew live a life of sanctity? As *Chazal* state, "Sanctify yourself through what is permitted to you." Meaning, it is understood that the Jew must refrain from what is forbidden by the *Torah*. However, one must strive to live a life of sanctity by partaking of this world only to the degree of necessity. Although one is physically inclined, one must subdue his inclinations and not pursue them. By utilizing the material only as a means to achieve the spiritual, the Jewish people will reflect the posture of *Yaakov* (Israel). They will dominate the physical for a spiritual end. Consequently, they will be sanctified.

G-d designated the Jewish people as “the Children of Israel” to communicate to every Jew the he has the ability to dominate the physical and spiritual as *Yaakov* had done. Just as *Yaakov* was able to ascend to this unique level of spirituality through the study of *Torah*, so too can every Jew. As it states regarding *Yaakov*, “He was the perfect man, who dwelt in the tent (of *Torah*).” Although one has inclinations that attempt to dominate and control him, G-d has given the Jewish people the antidote to be able to subdue and control these inclinations. As the *Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin* states, “I (G-d) have created the evil inclination. I have created *Torah* as its antidote.”

## The Jew, Understanding His Commonality with G-d

The *Torah* states, “You shall be holy because I your G-d am holy.” The *Midrash* asks, “Why does G-d want the Jewish people to be holy? Because G-d said, ‘I have attached you to My loins...’ As it states in *Yirmiyahu*, ‘Just as one’s belt is attached to one’s waist so too are the Jewish people attached to G-d.’ (Since the Jewish people are attached to G-d and enmeshed with Him, they must reflect His characteristic of Holiness. In order for this special relationship to exist, the Jewish people must have a commonality with G-d.)

G-d said to the Jewish people, ‘I am not similar to the mortal king who does not permit his subjects to carry his name (which would be punishable by death)... However, you carry My Name. Every appellation to which I am referred, I have bestowed upon you.’ For example, G-d is referred to as *Elokim*, so too does G-d refer to the Jewish people as *Elokim*. As it is stated in Psalms, ‘I have said that you (the Jewish people) are *Elokim*.’ G-d is referred to as *Chacham* (wise) and He refers to the Jewish people as *Chachamim*. G-d is referred to as *Dode* (Beloved) and He refers to the Jewish people as beloved... G-d is identified as *Chassid* (scrupulously pious) and He refers to His people as the scrupulously pious. G-d is referred to as *Kadosh* (holy) and He refers to the Jewish people as *Kadoshim* (holy). As it states, ‘You shall be holy...’ What is the significance of G-d identifying the Jewish people with His own appellations?

*Rambam* writes in The Fundamentals of Torah (*Hilchos Yisodei HaToah*) that there are numerous appellations for G-d. Why must there be so many appellations that

identify G-d? Why would it not be sufficient to use the generic reference “G-d” or “Lord.” G-d revealed Himself to the Jewish people through many appellations to allow them to understand that He interacts and relates to this existence in many contexts. For example, the appellation “*Hashem* (YKVK)” connotes the Attribute of Mercy. It also communicates the He is an infinite Being. This appellation is used when G-d is relating to existence through His Attribute of Mercy. The appellation “*Elokim*” connotes the Attribute of Justice. When this appellation is used it is to give one the understanding that G-d is relating to existence within the context of Divine Judgment. G-d identifies and reveals Himself through these various appellations so that we could understand the many contexts in which He interacts with existence.

G-d refers to the Jewish people with every one of His own appellations in order to reveal to them their spiritual potential and relevance to Him. Just as one’s belt is attached to one’s waist, so too are the Jewish people attached to G-d. This communicates a reality of closeness between G-d and the Jewish people that can be achieved when they reflect His characteristics. G-d identifies the Jew as “wise” because he innately has the potential to come upon wisdom. If one chooses to invest his life foolishly, it is only as a result of his choice to do so. Therefore, G-d identifies the Jewish people with His appellations in order to reveal to them their multiple levels of potential. Thus, they have a multilateral commonality with Him.

The Jewish people are the only nation in existence that G-d had bestowed His appellations upon. Indicating, that no other nation has this level of relevance to Him as the Jewish people. They are the only one’s who have the ability to reflect G-d’s characteristics. We say in the *Shema*, “...*Hashem* is our G-d, *Hashem* is One.” It is true that G-d is the Supreme Omnipotent G-d to all nations, however only the Jewish people, because of their spiritual character are able to identify Him as “our G-d,” which indicates a personalization of the relationship. G-d therefore, G-d commands the Jewish people to be “holy (*kadosh*)” by separating themselves from excess, because this commonality.

## Retaining One’s Focus

The *Torah* tells us that there is a *mitzvah* to count the days of the *Omer* from the second day of Passover

until the festival of *Shavuos*. The *Omer* is a semi-morning period, during which one does not engage in celebration. The *Gemara* in Tractate *Yevamos* tells us that between the festival of Passover and *Shavuos*, 24,000 students of *Rebbe Akiva* passed away in a plague. They perished over a 33-day period.

There are two opinions cited in the Code of Jewish Law regarding the time period that the mourning period is observed. One opinion is that the students of *Rebbe Akiva* had died during the first 33 days of the *Omer*, culminating on the 33rd day (Lag B'Omer). Although the students had also died on the 33rd day, during the daytime period of that day one is permitted to engage in celebration. This is based on the principle that on the last day of a mourning period it is sufficient to observe only the beginning of the day in mourning. There is another opinion that the students of *Rebbe Akiva* began dying on the first of the month of Iyar and continued dying until *Shavuos*, with the exception of the 33rd day when there was a respite from tragedy.

The *Gemara* tells us that after the 24,000 students of *Rebbe Akiva* passed away the world was desolate and devoid of *Torah*. After experiencing this level of spiritual devastation and loss, how do we understand that one celebrates on the 33rd day? According to the opinion that the students continued dying until *Shavuos*, one could say that when there was a respite on the 33rd day, it was believed that the plague had ceased, which would be cause for celebration. However, when the plague continued on the following day, in retrospect, it was realized that the tragedy was meant to continue. After realizing the dimension of tragedy, why would one continue in the future to celebrate the 33rd day of the *Omer* when it was revealed to be only a single-day respite?

One could say that although the Attribute of Justice was only held in abeyance for one day, it is sufficient cause to celebrate. This is because the world was able to benefit from having *Torah* sages of this unique

caliber even for only one additional day. The benefit of their presence, even for one day, is unlimited. In addition, one would think that once the Attribute of Justice is unleashed, it is not possible to withdraw it until the entire measure of Divine Justice is meted out.

The respite on the 33rd day of the *Omer* demonstrated that regardless of the intensity of the Attribute of Justice, the Attribute of Mercy can intervene. This day taught the Jewish people a lesson that they should not despair even in the most trying times. This is sufficient reason to allow rejoicing on the 33rd day, despite the fact that the students continued to die on the following day.

According to the opinion that the plague ceased on the 33rd day, only after all of his students had perished, we see that *Rebbe Akiva* was not incapacitated as a result of the overwhelming tragedy. He understood that he needed to establish an eternal continuum of *Torah* in the world. He immediately began laying the foundation for the future of the Jewish people. He chose five individuals to be mentored as his students to carry on the Sinai tradition until the end of time.

Only as a result of this spiritual rejuvenation of *Torah*, was all the *Kiddush Hashem* (Sanctification of G-d's Name) throughout the generations possible. The basis for our spiritual existence as a Jewish people until the end of time is only attributed to what *Rebbe Akiva* had immediately addressed after the demise of his student. Therefore, despite the pain of the moment it is sufficient reason to rejoice and celebrate for the sake of the future.



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