

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter XXX: Kedoshim (Lev. 19:1–20:27)

### Essay 1. Holiness and the three-fold soul

**מדרש** ילקוט "קדושים תהיו כי קדוש אני" וכו' אם מקדישים אתם עצמכם מעלה אני עליכם כאילו קדשתם אותי. או אינו אומר אלא אם קדשתם אותי הריני מקודש ואם לאו איני מקודש, תלמוד לומר "כי קדוש אני", בקדושותי אני בין מקדישים ובין אינם מקדישים. אבא שאול אומר פמליא של מלך מה עליה לעשות להיות מס[ק]ה את המלך עכ"ל. והוא תמוה.

There is a **Midrash Yalkut**:

**“You shall be holy, for I am holy,”<sup>1</sup> etc. If you sanctify yourselves, I ascribe it to you as though you sanctified Me. Or perhaps it means only that if you sanctify Me, then I am sanctified, and if not, I am not sanctified—therefore the verse states, “for I am holy”: in My holiness I remain, whether you sanctify Me or whether you do not sanctify Me. Abba Shaul says: What is incumbent upon the retinue of a king? To emulate the king.**

- Yalkut Shimoni, parashat Kedoshim, remez 604

Question 1: **This is puzzling.** How can we sanctify G-d?

וגיש לומר דאיתא בזוהר תצנוה (דף קפ"ב ע"א) פד ברא הקב"ה לבר נש עביד ליה בדיקנא עילאה ונפח ביה רוחא קדישא דכליל בתלת נפש רוח ונשמה ועילא מכלא נשמה וכו', ואי הוה נשמתא קדישא אעיל לה בפולחנא אחרא האי הוא מסאיב לה ונפק מפולחנא דמריה, בגין דתלת חילין אילין פלהו עד וכו', על דא נאמר "הולך את-חכמים יחכם ורעה כסילים" וכו'.

**It may be explained as stated in the Zohar, Tetzaveh (182a):**

**When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created man, He made him in a supernal likeness and breathed into him a holy spirit composed of three—*nefesh, ruach, and neshama*—and above all of them is the *neschama*, for it is the Supernal force by means of which man can apprehend and keep the commandments of the Holy One. If that holy *neschama* is brought into another form of worship,**

\* English translation: Copyright © 2026 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays are available at <https://zstorah.com>

<sup>1</sup> Lev. 19:2.

**this defiles it and it departs from the service of its Master, because these three forces are all one**, being merged one in the other on the pattern of the supernal mystery. **Concerning this it is said, “He who walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm.”**<sup>2</sup>

- Zohar, parashat Tetzaveh 6:53 (II:182a)

וְכַתֵּב הַרְמֵז ו' ל' דְקָשָׁה אִיךְ הָאָדָם מְטַמָּא נְשַׁמְתּוֹ וְאִיךְ אֶפְשֶׁר שֶׁתְּשַׁלּוּט הַטּוֹמְאָה בְּעַצָּם כָּל כָּךְ רוּחַנִי וְעֲלִיוֹן. לָכֵן אָמַר כִּי טַעַם הַתִּיּוֹחֶסוֹת טוֹמְאָה לְנִשְׁמָה הוּא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁנֶּפֶשׁ רוּחַ נְשַׁמָּה מְשַׁתְּתָפִים יַחַד וְהָיָה לְאֶחָדִים. וְאִם כֵּן פִּינּוֹן שֶׁנִּפְגְּמָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ שֶׁהִיא מֵעוֹלָם הָעֲשִׂיָּה שֶׁשָׁם הָרַע מְרוּבָה עַל הַטּוֹב מִזֶּה מְגִיעַ פָּגָם לְרוּחַ וְנִשְׁמָה, עַל דֶּרֶךְ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "הוֹלֵךְ אֶת־חֲכָמִים יִחְכַּם וְרָעָה כְּסִילִים יִרְעֶה", דְּכִינּוֹן שֶׁהַנֶּפֶשׁ הִיא שְׁלִימָה מִמְּנָה יוֹשֵׁפֶעַ אֹר לְרוּחַ וְנֶפֶשׁ שֶׁמְשַׁתְּתָפִים עִמָּה, וְזֶהוּ "הוֹלֵךְ אֶת־חֲכָמִים", וְלִהְיוֹת סִיפָא דְקָרָא וְהוּא מְבוֹאֵר עַכ"ל בְּקִיצוֹר.

**The Remez, of blessed memory,**<sup>3</sup> **wrote that it is difficult to understand:**

**How does a person defile his *neshama*, and how can impurity have dominion over something so spiritual and elevated? Therefore, he says that the reason impurity is ascribed to the *neshama* is because *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama* participate together and become one. Accordingly, once the *nefesh*—which is from the world of *Asiyah*<sup>4</sup>, where evil predominates over good—is blemished, that blemish propagates to the *ruach* and the *neshama*, in the manner of what is said, “He who walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm.” For since the *neshama* is complete, light flows from it to the *ruach* and *nefesh* that participate with it—and this is the meaning of “he who walks with the wise”; and the opposite is the end of the verse. This is explained.**

- Remez on Zohar, parashat Tetzaveh 6:53 (II:182a)

This is the language of the Remez, **in brief**. Thus, the answer to Question 1 is that we sanctify G-d by aligning the *nefesh* and *ruach* with the *neshama*.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. 13:20.

<sup>3</sup> Moses ben Mordecai Zacuto (c. 1625–1697).

<sup>4</sup> Kabbalah speaks of the four central worlds: *Atzilut* (“the world of emanation”), *Beriah* (“the world of creation”), *Yetzirah* (“the world of formation”), and *Asiyah* (“the world of action”). The last three terms appear (in verb form) in Isaiah 43:7, “Every one that is called by My name, and for My glory, I have created him, I have formed him, indeed, I have made him.” *Atzilut* emerges directly from G-d’s infinite light (revelation); this world is all good. *Atzilut* is the soul and the source of life to *Beriah*, the first world created from nothing, where Seraphim are created. *Beriah* is mostly good, with some bad. *Beriah* is the soul and the source of life to *Yetzirah*, where angels are created, forces entrusted with performing tasks without any free choice. *Yetzirah* is half good and half bad. *Yetzirah* is the soul and the source of life to *Asiyah*, our finite world in which created beings have a strong sense of independence. *Asiyah* is mostly bad, though there is some good. Therefore, the worlds are all linked, and all have a connection to G-d’s infinite light.

ובפרשת ויקרא (דף ז' ע"א) כתב הזוהר "ובת־פהו" דא נשמתא קדישא דאקרי ברתא דמלקא דנשמתא קדישא מזיווגא דמלקא ומטרוניתא נפקא, וכו' בפרשת כי תצא (דף רע"ז) אית נשמתא דאיהי מטרוניתא עכ"ל. ובלאו הכי ידוע שהנשמה היא חלק אלוה ממעל.

**In Parashat Vayikra (page III:7a) the Zohar writes:**

**“If a priest’s daughter** [becomes a layman’s wife, she may not eat of the sacred gifts; but if the priest’s daughter is widowed or divorced and without offspring, and she returns to her father’s house as in her youth, she may eat of her father’s food].”<sup>5</sup> **This is the holy neshama, which is called the daughter of the King, for the holy neshama emerges from the union of the King and the Queen,** and is therefore the lower body consisting of male and female, there being a corresponding *neshama* above. *“If she will be widowed”* from that body to which she was united, *“or divorced”* from that portion of the Holy Name, because *“she is without offspring”* to resemble therewith that which is above and to be linked to the Holy Name, then *“she returns”* to be restored to her original state. Thereupon *“she returns to her father’s house”*, that is, to the Holy One, blessed be He, *“as in her youth”*, as at first, and *“she may eat of her father’s food”*, to partake of the delights of the King.

- Zohar, parashat Vayikra 13:96 (III:7a)

**Likewise in parashat Ki Tetze, the Zohar (page III:277a) writes:**

In the hidden teachings of the Torah, we must rely upon a parable: **there is a neshama that is a Queen** [drawn from *Atzilut*], and there is a *neshama* that is a maidservant [drawn from *Beriah*], as in “When someone sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go free as the other slaves do.”<sup>6</sup> And there is a *neshama* that is a common maid [from *Asiyah*].

- Zohar, parashat Ki Tetze 3:30 (III:277a)

**Even aside from this, it is known that the neshama is, as if to say, a portion of G-d above.** Obviously, G-d is not divisible. The intent is that the *neshama* is a spiritual extension of G-d, not a physical division. Thus, the *neshama* can remain holy even while in man’s body.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lev. 22:12.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 21:7.

ובנה נבא לביאור המדרש, אם מקדישים אתם עצמכם דהיינו נפש ורוח שצריכים להתקדש שבנה ישפתפו עם הנשמה, מעלה אני עליכם כאילו קדשתם אותי דהיינו כאילו קדשתם אף הנשמה שהיא חלק ממני אף על פי שהיא קדושה מצד עצמה, או אינו אומר אלא אם קדשתם אותי הריני מקודש ואם לאו איני מקודש דהיינו אם קדשתם הנשמה במעשיכם הטובים היא מקודשת ואם לאו אינה מקודשת מצד עצמה שפינון שנשמתה לתוך הגוף אבדה קדושתה, ונפקא מינה שאין לכם כל כך עונש אם תחללו אותה.

**With this we come to a clarification of the Midrash: “If you sanctify yourselves,” that is, the *nefesh* and *ruach*, which need to be sanctified so that they join with the *neschama*—“I ascribe it to you as though you sanctified Me,” that is, as though you sanctified even the *neschama*, which is a part of Me, even though it is intrinsically holy. Thus, the sanctification of man is really the alignment of *nefesh* and *ruach* with an already-holy *neschama*.**

The Midrash first entertains a mistaken assumption: **Or perhaps it means only that “if you sanctify Me, I am sanctified, and if not, I am not sanctified,” meaning: if you sanctify the *neschama* through your good deeds, it is sanctified, and if not, it is not sanctified intrinsically, since one might think that once it was sent into the body it lost its holiness—and the practical implication would be that you would not be so liable to punishment if you profane it.**

תלמוד לומר "כי קדוש אני" בקדושותי אני בין מקדישים ובין אינם מקדישים, ואם אני קדוש אף הנשמה שהיא חלק ממני היא קדושה מצד עצמה ויש לכם ליהדר שלא לפגום אותה ולטנפה במעשיכם הרעים, כי הפמליניא של מלך יש לה להיות מצפה לכבוד את המלך לעשות כל "מצותיו וחקיו ומשפטיו". ועיין בסבא דמשפטים על פסוק "וכי־ימכר איש את־בתו לאמה לא תצא כצאת העבדים".

**Therefore the verse states: “For I am holy”—in My holiness I remain, whether you sanctify Me or not. If I am holy, then the *neschama* [soul], which is a part of Me, is holy in its own right, and you must be careful not to blemish it or defile it through your evil deeds. For the retinue of a king is expected to honor the king, to perform all “His commandments, statutes, and ordinances.”<sup>7</sup>**

See also the “Saba of Mishpatim,” a narrative section of the Zohar in which a mysterious old man converses with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

**“When someone sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go free as the other slaves do.”** When the Holy One delivers His daughter, the holy *neschama*, to be a maidservant, enslaved in bondage unto you, I warn you, when her time comes, let her “not go free as the other slaves do,” polluted by sins, but free, illuminated, and pure, in order that her Master may be able to find joy in her, and to give her goodly reward in the splendors of Paradise . . . when she shall ascend again thence, bright and pure.

- Zohar, parashat Mishpatim 3:54 (II:96b)

<sup>7</sup> I Kings 8:58.

ובדרך זה יבואר מדרש אחר שם בילקוט העליונים מכתירים לפני הקב"ה שלש קדושות "קדוש קדוש קדוש", מה הקב"ה עושה נותן בראשו אֶחָד ושמים בראשו שני ישראל, הַדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב "כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי" וְהִתְקַדְּשׁוּם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים" עכ"ל. והוא תמוה.

**In this manner another Midrash there in Yalkut is explained: The supernal beings crown the Holy One, Blessed be He, with three sanctities—“holy, holy, holy.”<sup>8</sup> What does the Holy One, Blessed be He, do? He places one on His own head and two on the heads of Israel, as it is written, “For I am holy,”<sup>9</sup> “and you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy.”<sup>10</sup>**

- Yalkut Shimoni, parashat Kedoshim, remez 603

**Question 2: This too is puzzling.** Why does G-d keep only **one** sanctity for His “head” while giving **two** to the “heads of Israel”?

ולפי דרכנו אתי שפיר, שאף על פי שבמלאכים לא מצינו אלא חלק הרוח, כדכתיב "עשה מלאכיו רוחות", מפל מקום גם הם כשבאים בעולם הזה מתלבשים כדמות בני אדם, כדאימא בכמה מקומות בזוהר. ועיין בפרשת וַיִּרְא (דף ק"א) ובשעתא דנחתינ לעלמא מתלבשין באורין וביסודי דגולמין וכו'.

**According to our approach, this is well understood: even though regarding angels we find only the aspect of *ruach*, as it is written, “He makes His angels of the winds,”<sup>11</sup> nevertheless when they descend to this world, they clothe themselves in the form of human beings, as is found in several places in the Zohar. See parashat Vayera (page I:101a): “When they descend to the world, they are clothed in air and in the corporeal elements and appear to men in human shape.”<sup>12</sup>**

ועוד בפרשת משפטים (דף קי"ח ע"ב) אית מלאכין דמשפטים לגופא ואית מלאכין דמשפטים לנשמתא. ואית נשמתא לנשמתא. ומלאכין למלאכין "כי גבה מעל גבה שמר" וכו'. ולכן העליונים מכתירים לפני הקב"ה בשלש קדושות בנפש רוח ונשמה של הצדיקים, והקב"ה נותן אֶחָד בראשו לפי שהנשמה היא קדושה מצד עצמה, ושמים בראשו בניו כנגד נפש רוח שהצדיקים מקדשים אותם. ועוד פירשנו זה בדרך אחר לעיל פרשת מקץ על פסוק "רק הכפא אגדל ממך".

**Further in parashat Mishpatim (page II:118b):**

**There are angels that serve the body, and angels that serve the *neshama*.** Just as there is a distinction between body and soul, so there is a difference between angels of the body and angels of the soul. **There is a *neshama* over the *neshama* and angels over the angels, as it says, “For there is one high one who watches over him that is high; and there are yet higher ones over them.”<sup>13</sup>**

- Zohar, parashat Mishpatim 15:455 (II:118b)

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 6:3.

<sup>9</sup> Lev. 11:44.

<sup>10</sup> Lev. 11:43.

<sup>11</sup> Ps. 104:4.

<sup>12</sup> Zohar, parashat Vayera 6:94 (I:101a).

<sup>13</sup> Eccl. 5:7.

Therefore, the answer to Question 2 is that **the supernal beings crown the Holy One, Blessed be He, with three sanctities corresponding to *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neschama* of the righteous. The Holy One, Blessed be He, places one on His own head, since the *neschama* is intrinsically holy, and two on the heads of His children, corresponding to *nefesh* and *ruach*, which the righteous sanctify.** The angels recitation of “holy, holy, holy,” correspond not to G-d alone, but to the three-part soul structure.

**This was also explained by us in another way above in parashat Miketz (Essay 5) on the verse, “Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.”<sup>14</sup>**

ובדברך זה יבואר מדרש סוף פרשת שמיני "והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים . . . כי קדוש אני" כשם שאני קדוש כך אתם תהיו קדושים כשם שאני פרוש כך אתם תהיו פרושים עכ"ל. וקשה איך אפשר שיהיה האדם קדוש ופרוש כבואו אם הגוף מלא תאוות העולם. אלא לפי שהנשמה קדושה ואין לה עסק בהנאות גופניות, שהיא חלק אלוה ממעל, והרוח חוטא בהרהורים והנפש חוטאה במעשה, לכן אמרת הנשמה לרוח ולנפש כשם שאני קדוש ופרוש כך אתם תהיו קדושים ופרושים.

**In this manner is explained the Midrash at the end of parashat Shemini: “You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy . . . for I am holy”—just as I am holy, so you shall be holy; just as I am separate, so you shall be separate.”<sup>15</sup>**

It is initially difficult to understand this: **How can a person be holy and separate like his Creator, if the body is full of worldly desires? Rather, since the *neschama* is holy and has no involvement in bodily pleasures—for it is a portion of G-d above—and the *ruach* sins through sinful thoughts while the *nefesh* sins through action, therefore the *neschama* says to the *ruach* and the *nefesh*: just as I am holy and separate, so you too shall be holy and separate.**

\* \* \*

---

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 41:40.

<sup>15</sup> Yalkut Shimoni on Torah, parashat Shemini, remez 546.