

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778\*

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

Essay 7. Israel should strive to retain its holiness and its connection to G-d

**מִדְרָשׁ** "וְאַבְדַּל אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָעַמִּים לִהְיוֹת לִי": אִם אַתֶּם מוֹבְדָלִים מִן הָעַמִּים הֲרֵי אַתֶּם שְׂלִי, וְאִם לֹא הֲרֵי אַתֶּם שֶׁל נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר וְחִבְרִיּוֹ עַכ"ל. וְהוּא תִימָא, דְּמָה בָּא לְהוֹדִיעֵנוּ?

There is a **midrash** on the verse, “ ‘You shall be holy to Me, for I the L-rd am holy, **and I have set you apart from other peoples to be Mine**’ (Lev. 20:26): **If you hold yourselves apart from them then you will be Mine, but if not, you belong to Nebuchadnezzar and others like him.**”<sup>1</sup> **This is astonishing, for what is it coming to inform us?**

וְיִוָּבֵן בְּמָה שֶׁפִּירְשׁוּ הַמְּקוֹבְלִים עַל פְּסוּק "הִיוּ צְרִיָּה לְרֹאשׁ" שֶׁאַמְרוּ ו'ל כָּל הַמֵּיצֵר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל נַעֲשֶׂה רֹאשׁ, דִּהְיִינוּ שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִן הֲרֵאוּי הוּא שֶׁיְהִי כְּלָם מְוִשְׁרֵשִׁים בְּקִדּוּשָׁה וְכֵן הוּא בְּאַמַּת כְּשַׁעוּשִׁים רְצוּנוֹ שֶׁל מְקוּם. אֲבָל כְּשֶׁהֵם חוֹטְאִים הַקְּדוּשָׁה פּוֹרְחַת מֵהֶם וְהִטּוּמְאָה אֲדַרְבָּא אוֹחֲזֵת בָּהֶם. וְלִפִּי שֶׁלְעוֹלָם הֵם מְקִימִים אִיזוֹ מִצְוָה מִשּׁוּם הֲכִי אֵינָהּ נִיצוּץ שֶׁל קְדוּשָׁה נִשְׁאָר בָּהֶם. אֲבָל זֶה הַנִּיצוּץ הַנִּשְׁאָר כּוֹעֵס עֲלֵיהֶם מִפְּנֵי שֶׁנֶּגְרְמוּ לוֹ לִהְיוֹת נִפְרָד מִשׁוֹרֵשׁ הַקְּדוּשָׁה וְאֲדַרְבָּא עֲתָה מוֹכֵרָה לוֹ לִישֵׁב עִם הַטּוּמְאָה.

**This will be understood by what the Kabbalists explained on the verse, “Those who distress her have become the chief, her foes are at ease because the L-rd has afflicted her for her many transgressions; her infants have gone into captivity before the enemy” (Lam. 1:5). The [rabbis] of blessed memory said, “Anyone who distresses Israel will become the chief” (Gittin 56b). That is, it’s proper for Israel that all are rooted in holiness and then that’s truly when they do the will of the Omnipresent. But when they sin, holiness flies away from them and to the contrary, impurity holds onto them. But because they always keep some mitzvah or other, because of that, some spark of holiness remains within them. But the spark remains angry with them because they have caused it to be separated from the root of holiness, and to the contrary, now it is forced to sit with the impurity.**

---

\* English translation: Copyright © 2021 by Charles S. Stein.

<sup>1</sup> Sifra, Kedoshim 9:12. The midrash continues: “R. Elazar b. Azaryah says: Whence is it derived that a man should not say: I do not desire to wear *sha'atnez*; I do not desire to eat the flesh of a pig; I do not desire to have illicit relations? [Rather, he should say,] I do desire it, but what can I do? My Father in Heaven has decreed against it! [It is derived from the verse, ‘and I have set you apart from the peoples to be unto Me.’ It is found, then, that he separates from illicit relations because he accepted upon himself the Kingdom of Heaven.”

והנה כל מלכי האומות יש להם ניצוץ של קדושה שבשביל זה אנו מברכים שנמן מפבדו לבשר ודם, וכמו שהנה לעשו בדקתיב "כיציד פפיו", שהנה לו ניצוץ קדושה בראשו ובשביל זה זכה הראש להקבר במערת המכפלה כנודע, ובשביל ניצוץ זה היה יצחק אוהב אותו אולי יחזירנו למוטב. ומעתה כשישראל חוטאים הניצוץ שנשאר בהם שהוא יחיד רוצה להדבק באותו ניצוץ האחר שיש לו למלך של האומה ומגביר פח האומה נגד ישראל כיון שהוא בכעס עמהם.

**Behold, all the kings of the nations have a spark of holiness, on account of which we say a blessing upon seeing such a king that [G-d] “has given of His glory to flesh and blood,” and as was the case with Esau, as it is written, “Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob” (Gen. 25:28). For he had a sacred spark in his head, and because of this, his head merited to be buried in the Cave of the Patriarchs, as is known,<sup>2</sup> and because of this spark, Isaac loved him, that maybe he would turn him around for the better. From now, when Israel sins, the spark that remains within them, which is alone, wants to cling to that other spark of the king of the nation controlling Israel, and increases the power of that nation against Israel, because he is angry with them.**

וזהו שאמר המדרש אם אתם מובדלים וכו' הרי אתם שלי, מושרשים בלכם בקדושה ואם לאו הרי אתם וכו', שכינן שנדבקתם בהם, הניצוץ שלכם מגביר פח האויב. וכן מצינו שנבוכדנצר נקרא אריה, והחריב בית המקדש הנקרא אריה, כמו שאמרו ז"ל. ובדרך זו יובן נמי מה שאמרו ז"ל בפרק קמא דברכות צדיק ממנו — בולע, צדיק גמור — אינו בולע.

**This is what the Midrash said, “If you hold yourselves apart from them then you will be Mine,” rooted in holiness; “but if not, then you belong to Nebuchadnezzar and others like him,” because since you clung to them, your spark increases the power of the enemy. Similarly, we find that Nebuchadnezzar was called “a lion” and destroyed the Temple that was called “a lion.”<sup>3</sup> As [the rabbis] of blessed memory said in the first chapter of tractate Berachot (7b), “the verse: ‘The wicked swallows the man more righteous than he’ (Habakkuk 1:13) [means]: The [man who is] more righteous than he, [but not completely righteous], he swallows. The completely righteous he does not swallow.”**

\* \* \*

<sup>2</sup> Targum Jonathan, Gen. 50:13.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter LVII: Kinnot (Lamentations), essay 9 for sources and extension discussion.