



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

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The Book of Vayikra revolves around “Mikdash”, the Temple and Mishkan, beginning with the laws of Korbanot (offered in the Mikdash), continuing (in Parashat Shmini) with the laws of Tum’ah and Tahara (who may/may not enter the Mikdash) and, starting with today’s parashiyot, the laws of sanctity and holiness (of the Mikdash and the nation). In fact, the basic theme of these parshiyot is expressed in the closing words of the first parasha, the command not to defile the land with moral turpitude, a warning that leads us directly into the opening words of next parasha: “kedoshim t’h’yu”, “you shall be holy.” Rashi throughout his commentary explains that the root idea of “kedusha” is separation. Hashem demands that we be separate, unique, “holier” (no, I didn’t say better) than the other nations. It is the same demand He made of us when we stood at Har Sinai: “V’atem t’h’yu li mamlechet kohanim v’goy kadosh”, to be a holy nation, one dedicated to the service of G-d.

Surprisingly, our haftarah from Sfer Amos opens with words that seem to express precisely the opposite view: “Hahlo chiv’nei chushiyim atem li”, “Behold you are just like the Cushite nation to me”, adding that G-d has taken other nations out of foreign lands just as He had done for Israel! Given this truth, why did Chazal

establish that we read this selection which, seemingly, undermines the very theme of the parasha?

In actuality, this chosen reading is especially pertinent to the theme of kedusha, for it expresses a most important idea: that the “specialness” of Israel is not predicated upon miracles of her past, not on her lineage or “yichus”, nor on Hashem’s promised miracles for future generations. Rather, Israel’s chosenness is based upon their ability to retain the status of kedusha, a standing which can be achieved and kept only through their fealty to G-d and His mitzvot. When Israel shrugs off her commitment to Hashem, when she ignores her miraculous past and, thereby, denies her glorious future, she is no different than any other nation. She is, in fact, worse than they are. Amos expresses this idea so powerfully in the third chapter of his book when he states: “Rak etchem yada’ti...al ken efkod aleichem et kol avonoteichem”, It is because G-d revealed Himself to us, because we have witnessed His miracles over and over again, that He expects fidelity and faithfulness from us more than He does from other peoples!

No. Kedusha is not a gift bestowed upon us that makes us special; it is an obligation we are challenged to fulfill in order to retain the special relationship we have with the Almighty. ■