

Kedoshim

May 14, 2016

This Week's Text

דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עֵדוּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

Leviticus 19:2 Speak to the entire congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I, Adonai your G-d, am holy.'



Artist: Barbara Mendez

Linking Our Text to Modern Israel

In this week's portion, *Kedoshim*, we find the commandment *v'ahavta lereicha kamocho*—"love your neighbor as yourself." Yet, as many commentators have asked, can a person (or a people) be commanded to "feel" an emotion such as love?

In a broader context, we see that this law is replete with commanded behaviors which would make it appear that the Israelites were loving and caring. Refraining from stealing or cheating, avoiding the defrauding or oppression of others, not insulting the deaf, not placing a stumbling block in the way of the blind, nor singling out the poor or showing special deference to the rich, judging with fairness, avoiding vengefulness or bearing a grudge - these are all hallmarks of a just and caring society. An observer of such a society might assume that these people, indeed, "love each other as they love themselves."

Over the years of ongoing immigration in the modern State of Israel we observe this "love of neighbor," a seminal Jewish value from this passage from the section of Torah entitled "The Holiness Code." As a nation Israel has endeavored to imbue the country's ethos with these values. As a nation of immigrants, the ethical value of taking care of one another and sustaining the broader ideas of the Ten Commandments still holds.

More than 25 years ago, in an address at the AIPAC Policy Conference in 1989, Alan Dershowitz explained, "One does not judge a democracy by the way its soldiers immediately react, young men and women under tremendous provocation. One judges a democracy by the way its courts react, in the dispassionate cool of judicial chambers. And the Israeli Supreme Court and other courts have reacted magnificently. For the first time in Mideast history, there is an independent judiciary willing to listen to grievances of Arabs—that judiciary is called the 'Israeli Supreme Court.'"

Additional References:
[Hamoked: Center for the Defense of the Individual](#) - a listing of numerous NGO's that support Israelis and Palestinians

At the same time, a proliferation of civil rights organizations have risen in Israel in the past 50 years. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (established in 1972), the Israel Religious Action Centre (1987), and The Israel Democracy Institute (1991) are just a few of the dozens of groups that fight for and protect the civil rights of Jews, Arabs, Christians, refugees, the disabled, vulnerable women and children, GBLTQ+ individuals, as well as the Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Gaza.

While it's evident that the ideal of neighborly love commanded in *Kedoshim* is not yet fully realized at all times between and among all communities in Israel, the democratic process, bolstered by public support for government and civil rights groups, helps to ensure that all Israeli citizens and neighboring Palestinians have an opportunity to assert their rights, work toward greater camaraderie, and look to a future of peaceful coexistence.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Kedoshim* is much more than the plural form of "holy." Rather, *kadosh* connotes: sacred, unique, Divine, complete, and separate. What are some elements of Israeli society that set it apart from the rest of the world? Is it easier to maintain our identities as Jews if Israel maintains itself as *separate* from other non-Jewish countries? What does that mean for non-Jews living there?

2. We know from Israel's Declaration of Independence that the state's founders expressed the hope that "the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel... return to the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the State, with full and equal citizenship and the representation in all its bodies and institutions, provisional or permanent." It took Israel more than two decades to implement that aspiration. Sixty-five years after its founding, the state's improving track record for its Arab minority is significant, with Arabs holding 15% of Israel's parliamentary seats, and Arabs serving on Israel's Supreme Court and in the foreign ministry. Compare Israel's efforts on behalf of minorities to other nations, within the Middle East, in Europe, and North America.

3. What are some advantages and disadvantages of being set apart? Has the Israel which was founded as a Jewish state and guided by a desire to be an *Am Kadosh*, a Holy Nation, influenced the behavior of other countries and peoples of the world? If so, in what ways? How about examples of Israel sending its expertise abroad to help countries and people under the duress of sudden natural disaster, like the recent earthquake in Nepal or in Haiti in January 2010.