

## A PARASHA THOUGHT

### Inherently Holy

"You Shall be holy, for Holy am I, Hashem your G-d. (19:2)"

The commentaries discuss whether this commandment refers to the abstinence of specific illicit relationships, or if it is providing a framework for a Torah lifestyle. Working with the latter approach, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein demonstrates that all Jews are inherently holy, and the edict to "be holy" is a mandate that we be cognizant of this intrinsic sanctity, allowing its awareness to be reflected in our lives. The source of our innate holiness is conveyed through the words "for Holy am I." On its surface the verse seems to be enjoining Israel to emulate G-d and walk in His ways; to be holy as He is Holy. Rabbi Feinstein, however, interprets that Hashem is expressing to Israel that as children of a Holy G-d they are naturally holy as well. It is this sanctity that is the key to our connection with Hashem. Much like a Kohen (priest) is governed by unique and specific laws due to his elevated stature of spirituality, our inborn purity enables our intimate relationship with Hashem and His Torah. The Torah is calling on us to recognize that, as a holy people, our

sanctity should be manifest in the lifestyles we live. Ideals and morals find their expression in the actions and activities we pursue. Thus, we are charged with a challenging but not complicated task: to strive to constantly do the Will of Hashem

Ultimately, the road to sanctity is not through specific action, but through a change in perspective. By viewing life through the prism of the Torah, we can recognize that all mundanity serves as an arena for spiritual growth and connection to Hashem. Relating to all of life as a religious pursuit is a concept specifically pertinent to these days between Pesach and Shavous. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh explains that as we connect the date of our national freedom with the giving of the Torah through the counting of the Omer, we are portraying that our nationhood finds its expression only in service of Hashem. Holiness is not reserved for select few individuals, but is within the reach of every Jew. When we have the courage to live with integrity, with our lives reflecting the values we know to be true, then we will have achieved greatness. 🌟

RABBI  
YEHUDA  
LEVI



## LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL (CHOSHEN MISHPAT)

WITH  
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

*Parshas Kedoshim* ends with a reiteration of the promise that Hashem will give *Eretz Yisroel* to the Jewish people as an inheritance. This fact may play a decisive role in applying a well-known principle cited many times in the Talmud in the name of Shmuel – "*Dina d'malchusa dina*, the law of the kingdom is the law."

The *Rishonim* offer different explanations for the rationale behind this principle. The *Ra"n* (*Nedarim* 28a) cites *Tosofos* that the law of the kingdom is the law because the king owns the land, and he can say that if you refuse to accept my rules you must leave. Therefore, they maintain, this can only apply to non-Jewish kings who in fact own their lands, but the land of Israel was given to the Jewish people, not their kings. There is no basis at all for this principle in *Eretz Yisroel*. The *Rashba*'m (*Baba Basra* 54b), however, offers a different basis for *dina d'malchusa*. He explains that there is something of a social contract, a presumption of a communal acceptance of the king and his laws. This seemingly should apply universally, even in the land of Israel.

Another difference between these approaches might be found in a country governed as a democracy, where the land is not owned by the government, and no one can

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## LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL (CHOSHEN MISHPHAT)

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be forced to leave. According to the *Ra"n* and *Tosofos*, there would seem to be no basis for saying *dina d'malchusa dina* in these contemporary realities. However according to the approach of the *Rashba"m*, *dina d'malchusa* would seem to be even more applicable in these types of governances.

It would seem that the *Ramba"m* also follows the approach of the *Rashba"m*, as he says clearly that this principle applies to both non-Jewish and Jewish kings. He also adds that the king must have a legitimate basis for his authority that is accepted by his subjects to qualify for this law. 🧐

## A SHINING EXAMPLE

RABBI EPHRAIM SKOLNIK

In the early 1980s, Rabbi Zevulun Reich was sent from an organization in Israel to help out a dwindling congregation in the Bronx, New York. When he landed in New York, a small group of mostly older men and women was excitedly waiting to greet the young rabbi. When Rabbi Reich arrived at the shul he was shocked to find it in a state of disrepair; the paint was peeling, there was mold on

the ceiling, and the floor was all ripped up. Rabbi Reich realized that the only way to uplift the community was to fix up the shul. As it was the middle of the winter, he decided that in honor of Purim he would fix up the shul and have a grand reopening. As Purim neared the excitement was palpable; the whole community was very excited. About a week before Purim there was a major snow storm, and Rabbi Reich went to check out the shul. To his dismay, he discovered a leak which resulted in an ugly splotch on one of the freshly painted walls. Realizing that he was not going to be able to get a painter in time, he ran to a local thrift store and was able to find a beautiful woven Star of David in a frame. Rabbi Reich purchased it and put it in the back seat of his car. As he was driving back to the shul, he saw an old Jewish lady standing by a bus stop. He pulled over and asked her where she was headed. She said she lived an hour away in New Jersey and just missed the bus so she was waiting two hours for the next one. He said, "Come, I will drive you." She got in the car and they started driving. As they were driving, she looked in the back seat and saw the woven tapestry. "Where did you get that?" she asked. "I found it in a thrift shop," he replied. The woman started shaking and said, "that's mine. I made it before the war for my husband who must have perished in the Holocaust. I haven't seen it in 40 years."

To be continued... 🧐

## TEFILLA TIDBITS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

The next set of the *birchos hashachar* are *brachos* thanking Hashem for specific gifts he has given us, first being the ability to see. In the *siddur Siach Yitzchak*, Rabbi Yitzchak Meltzen, a student of the Vilna Gaon, writes that when we thank Hashem for the ability to see, we should imagine the pain of someone who is blind and unable to enjoy the gift of sight. Additionally, he adds that besides people who are fully blind, we should also think of the pain of the people that have lost some of the strength in their eyes and are unable to fully enjoy the beauty of sight. Rav Meltzen wrote these comments in the time before eyeglasses were commonplace; however, in our time the *Olas Tamid* writes that in this *bracha* one should additionally thank Hashem for the great gift of glasses (and contact lenses), which bring the beauty of 20/20 vision to so many. 🧐



## ABARBANEL: ROYAL FINANCIER AND ADVISOR TO ALFONSO V OF PORTUGAL (PART I)

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

Most of us have probably heard of the Medieval Portuguese rabbi, scholar, philosopher, and businessman Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (the Abarbanel) and many have probably studied his commentary on *Tanach* at some point or another. Probably less are familiar with Abarbanel's fascinating career as a statesman, financier, and royal advisor to the Portuguese and Spanish monarchs. Likely, few are aware of the intriguing account of Abarbanel's escape from the clutches of the King of Portugal and his attempt, utilizing political influence and bribery, to avert the infamous and tragic expulsion of Spanish Jewry of 1492.

*Background* – Don Yitzchak Abarbanel was born in Lisbon in 1437 to an affluent, elite, and powerful family that had been ranked high amongst Jews and gentiles alike on the Iberian Peninsula for centuries. His father, Don Yehuda, descended from a line of prominent and highly influential Jewish leaders who originated from Seville in the Spanish Kingdom of Castile and served as royal advisors and financiers to the kings of Castile. After the 1391 anti-Jewish violence in Spain, the family moved to Portugal. Don Yehuda himself was no exception and was the admired lay leader of the Lisbon Jewish community. Although the condition of Jewish life in 15<sup>th</sup> century Portugal was certainly easier than in Spain, nonetheless it was certainly not a comfortable place for Jews to live.

In the 1460s and 1470s, the Abarbanel became increasingly active in the Jewish community of Lisbon and with Portuguese Jewry in general. His connections to the government, through his father Don Yehuda, earned him respect and admiration as a Jewish representative and statesman. Around 1475, Abarbanel was appointed to the royal court of Alfonso V, King of Portugal.

To be continued... 🧐