

## SHEMINI

(Preached in synagogue of Rabbi Seymour Turk  
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of Son of Rabbi Jakobovits - Fifth Avenue  
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In this portion we read of the tragedy that struck Aaron, the high priest of Israel, when his two sons were devoured by a fire from the Lord when ~~he~~ <sup>they</sup> ministered in the Temple and changed part of the regulations. We read that Aaron was silent at the time of this tragedy. Probably the grief, the inner protest, were too overwhelming for him to say anything at all. At this moment ~~Moses~~ turns to his mourning brother and says to him *אני יודע כי אתה בן אדם ואתה תמות*, "through those who are close to me will I be sanctified, and before the entire people will I be honored." What is it that Moses told his brother, and that he wished to impart to all posterity, at this time?

There are two concepts that are mentioned by Moses: kedushah, holiness, and ~~not~~ kaved, honor or respect. Both of these are worthy Jewish goals deserving of our highest aspirations. Yet, they are not equal to each other; one is on ~~the~~ a higher level than the other. Kaved or honor refers to an attitude that is external to the soul. I honor or respect somebody, but that does not necessarily mean that I subscribe to his opinions. I admire or give reverence to a great musician, although I

may be absolutely flat and a monotone. It is an external act of courtesy; a gesture that is sincere but does not involve my whole personality.

Kedushah or holiness, contariwise, implies an inner transformation, a total commitment and dedication of the entire personality toward the transcendent goal for which it strives. One can give kavod without being changed within. One cannot achieve kedushah until one has undergone a complete spiritual metamorphosis.

Now, kavod is something that the masses are capable of. Kedushah is something which only the initiate are capable of and obligated to achieve. Isaiah proclaims even as we do thrice daily, "holy holy is the Lord of Hosts", "the world is full of his kavod". The Lord of Hosts, he who is above and beyond the world, is in ~~His~~ essence kadosh, holy. That is the highest realm and the highest level. But insofar as kol ha-aretz, the entire world, <sup>are concerned</sup> they ordinary people, all ~~we~~ can perceive is - kavod, honor or respect.

Respect is a noble, good virtue. But is antiseptic, it does not require the involvement of one's inner self. Sanctity, on the other hand, is a higher, deeper, profounder commitment. Therefore Moses said: *אני אקבל*,  
I will receive.

"before the entire people will I receive kavod." For ordinary people it is sufficient that they come into the Temple and <sup>m</sup>Minister, that they pray, that they observe the decorusness that is so appropriate in a House of God.

For ordinary am, an attitude of kavod is about all that one can require of them. But when it comes to kerovai, those who are close to God, then kavod is not by any means sufficient; then only the transcendent and lofty goal of kedushah or holiness is worthwhile.

This, indeed, is what Moses told his brother Aaron. You may in your heart of hearts feel <sup>g</sup>agrieved: after all, your sons were ministering to God in the Temple, their heart was in the right place; so what if they changed a part of the service? The answer is: an attitude of kavod or honor for ~~A~~ God is sufficient for ordinary people. For kohanim or priests, for the children of Aaron, kavod is never enough. From them I expect a total dedication, the uncompromising commitment to kedushah or holiness. If your sons failed, it is because as <sup>K</sup>~~kerovim~~, those close to God, they have failed to aspire to kedushah. <sup>q1</sup>This is part of our problem in American Jewish life today. We suffer from <sup>what</sup>~~Prof.~~ Abraham Joshua Heschel has called "a theology of respect." <sup>^</sup>People come into the synagogue and they respect it - therefore they need not learn from it. They respect Torah, they respect Judaism, they respect religious people, they respect rabbis. And therefore the whole thing is externalized, it never penetrates within their hearts and souls. <sup>W</sup>What is required is a sense of kerovai, being close to God and therefore setting up as our ideal goal not only kavod but kedushah, holiness. In recent years,

with the so called return to religion that we have witnessed, <sup>has</sup> it ~~as~~ often seemed to me that as religion has become respectable, it has tended to become unholy; with its gain in prestige and ~~external~~ acceptance, it has lost some of its passion, its power of criticism, its totality, its involvement with mankind's most basic and fundamental destiny. ~~The Haftorah~~

The Haftorah of this week indicates the same idea. We read of the Ark being taken captive by the <sup>P</sup>hillistines and then being recaptured by David. David was overjoyed at the return of the Ark to the Camp of Israel. "And David danced with all his might." His sense of joy and thrill was excited by this great event, and so he responded in a blazing passion of holiness, realizing in practice the words he was to write later in the psalms <sup>בן ימיני מן הים</sup>, "all my bones do say O Lord who is like unto <sup>T</sup>hee." And then we read, in one verse "the Ark of the Lord was brought to the city of David" - the great and wonderful moment when the holiness of the ages was stamped indelibly upon the city of Jerusalem/ - "and Michal the daughter of Saul watched from beyond the window." What a difference is revealed in the contrast between the attitude of David and that of his wife, the princess Michal! While David is involved with his people in the holy undertaking, she, the princess, heiress to the aristocratic traditions of her family, stands far and distant, remote and removed, ~~from~~ behind the pane of glass, watching her husband David involved

with his people and with his joy and with his faith. *וְעִם שְׂמֵחָוּ, וְעִם אֱמוּנָתוֹ,*

and she despised him in her heart. She could not abide the whole theme

of David dancing about the Ark. And so when her husband comes home to

bless his home, she releases a torrent of abuse and reproach at him. How

can you, she cries, dance there as though you were one of the <sup>commoners</sup> ~~commoners~~, with

the maids and the servants and all the ordinary people? ~~And~~ <sup>The</sup> whole

corruptness of her attitude is revealed in two words in her first sarcastic

barb at her husband: *מַה זֶה לְךָ כְּבוֹד וְיָמִין* - what kind of honor or respect

(kavod) is it for the King of Israel to act the way you have!

<sup>the</sup> This was undoing of Michael the daughter of Saul. She was limited in her

horizons. She could not see beyond the level of kavod. She was forever sealed

off from a vision of kedushah. And therefore she did not understand that her

husband had transcended the limits of kavod and had risen to the level of kedushah.

No wonder that she was doomed to wither away and die and not leave any memory behind her.

This then must be our understanding our duty and our ambition. It is important,

of course, that our synagogue possesses the element of kavod - of courtesy, of

respect, honor, decorum. <sup>But it</sup> ~~What~~ is far more important that they attain, as

Kedushah -- well, the ideals of true devoutness, piety, and love of Torah.

When people come into a synagogue and listen to a sermon, and they "enjoy" it - that is the level of <sup>kavod</sup>~~kavod~~. When they are disturbed by it to the point of ~~feeling~~ they want to do something - then they are on <sup>✓</sup>thei<sup>^</sup>r way to kedushah.

The rabbi who strives to institute decorum, respectability, and honor in his congregation, has made the step towards kavod - an absolute prerequisite for a decent service. But that is not enough. The next step must be - kedushah, holiness, the establishment of a kehillah kedoshah - a holy community. To be "inspired" by a synagogue, the services, and the sermon - that is kavod. To be moved by them to obey the message, ~~the~~ to follow the <sup>ir</sup>~~line~~<sup>^</sup> of thinking, to live the life of Torah - that is the beginning of the beginning of a life of kedushah or holiness.