

Holy, Holy, Holy

"Come everyone, let's finish packing. We want to leave soon. The *chag* is coming, and we want to be in Yerushalayim before the *regel* begins."

"Will we go to the Beis HaMikdash?"

"B'ezrat Hashem, kinderlach."

"I have a question, Abba?"

"Yes, Yossie."

"Why are you taking so many fruits with us to Yerushalayim this year? We have two oxen loaded with fruits. Last year we hardly took any fruit. We bought what we needed in Yerushalayim."

"Very perceptive Yossie. That is an excellent question. This year is different from last year. This year is the fourth year of the *shmitta* cycle. This is one of the years that a portion of our crop has the *kedusha* (holiness) of *maaser sheini*. Hashem commanded us to take these fruits with us up to Yerushalayim and eat them there."

"Let's see if I understand, Abba. We eat *maaser sheini* - holy fruits - in Yerushalayim - the Holy City."

"Correct, Yossie."

"We ourselves must be very holy to do this, Abba."

"You have touched on a deep point, Yossie. Hashem gave us a big beautiful Torah, full of 613 mitzvos. Each one is an opportunity to become holier. This particular mitzvah takes a very mundane physical activity - eating fruit - and sanctifies it. It turns eating into an opportunity to come one step closer to Hashem."

"How do we know that, Abba?"

"The Torah itself says it, Yossie. 'You shall surely *maaser* (take one tenth) all of your crop...and eat it before Hashem your G-d in the place that He chose to rest His Name...so that you will learn to fear Hashem your G-d all of your days' (Devarim 14:22-23). This mitzvah teaches us *Yiras Shamayim* (Fear of Heaven), a foundation of *Avodas Hashem*."

"How does it work, Abba?"

"Very simple, Yossie. Hashem blesses us with a beautiful crop of fruits. It is all from Him. He wants us to eat it and enjoy it. However, He knows that it is easy to forget Him, and fool ourselves into thinking that the crop came solely from the work of our hands. Therefore, He reminds us that He is The Provider. First, we must separate the holy portion of the crop, and give it to His agents here in this world, the Kohanim and Leviim. They have no land of their own; therefore, we must support them while they perform Hashem's Holy Service. There is still a portion of holy fruits left - *maaser sheini*.

This is our opportunity to 'taste' a bit of the holiness of the Kehuna. We purify ourselves, go to the Holy City, and eat these holy fruits *b'kedusha v'tahara* (in sanctity and purity). In this way we are like the Kohanim, when they perform their *avodah* of eating the *kodshim* (holy foods) *b'kedusha v'tahara*."

"We eat them before Hashem, Abba. How can we help but be inspired to fear Him and love Him for all of the good that He has given us."

"Yossie, I could not have said it better myself. This is the true *simcha* (happiness): coming close to The Holy One by elevating all of our activities, even eating, to serve Him. In this way we learn to fear Him all of our days."



Kinderlach . . .

This story is based on the commentary of Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch on the mitzvah of maaser sheini. He inspires us to see the holiness in all areas of our lives and all activities - even eating. This idea is expressed as a halacha in Shulchan Auruch Orach Chaim 231. "A person should place his eyes and heart on his ways. He should weigh all of his deeds on the 'scale' of his seichel (common sense). Whenever he sees something that will bring him to serve The Creator, he should do it. If it will not, he should refrain from it. One who does this will always be serving Hashem." Kinderlach, involve yourselves with holy activities all the time. Spend your whole life serving Hashem!

Hashem's Children

"You are Hashem's children. Do not cut yourselves when mourning" (Devarim 14:1). The Yalkut Shemoni has a collection of beautiful *drashas* on this verse. Self-mutilation in mourning was a barbaric custom practiced by the nations of the world. As one can imagine, it is very painful. This mitzvah shows how Hashem loves us dearly. He tells us not to torture ourselves with pain, and He gives

us *schar* (reward) for it. Similarly, He commands us not to eat insects - creatures that are disgusting, and He rewards us for that. He prohibits us from drinking blood, a truly repulsive act, and He rewards us. Only Hashem, who loves Bnei Yisrael like His Own children, would reward them for refraining from things that they would never have any desire to do.

We see another sign of Hashem's love for us in this week's parasha. He joins Klal Yisrael to His Holy Name three times. "You are Hashem's children" (Devarim 14:1). "For you are a Holy People to Hashem your G-d, and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people, from among all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Devarim 14:2). The Holy One said to Yisrael, "In this world I chose you, and joined My Name to you. In the World to Come, I will walk among you, in all of My Splendor."

The word for cutting the flesh is "*tisgodidu*". The root of the word is "*gedida*". That same root word can also mean a group - "*agudah*". When the Torah writes, "*lo tisgodidu*", it is also warning us not to splinter off into groups that argue and fight with one another. This will only result in strife and plague, as it did in the time of Korach. Rather, make yourselves into "*agudah achas*" - one unified group. This will result in the fulfillment of the verse "He built His upper chambers in Heaven, and founded His group on the earth" (Amos 9:6).

Kinderlach . . .

Hashem loves us. Do we need any more proof than this? He rewards us for mitzvos that we fulfill without effort. He joins His Holy Name to us. Additionally, He provides us with all of our needs, every moment of our lives. What does He ask in return? That we live together in unity. Kinderlach, there is nothing that pains a parent more than seeing his children fighting. Give Hashem nachas from His kinderlach. Live in peace, and help Him establish His place in Heaven.

Parasha Questions:

- Which mountain did they face to receive the brachot? The kelalo? (11:29)
- Where should Klal Yisrael bring their offerings? (Rashi 12:5)
- What should you do with the blood of an animal? (12:24) From where do we learn about the reward for mitzvos? (Rashi 12:25)
- What do you do to an "ir hanidachat"? (13:16-18)