

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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FAMILY SIDUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 18

WE’VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE עֲמִידָה—THE PRAYER WE SAY IN A LOW WHISPER WHILE STANDING.

- So we’re going to continue with the phrase at the bottom of page 35b.
- It begins אֱתָהּ קְדוֹשׁ.
- These first two words, אֱתָהּ קְדוֹשׁ, which are about God, say “You are holy.”
- You may remember that קְדוֹשׁ is the Hebrew word for “holy.”
- ***Does anyone remember the basic meaning, the שְׁוֵרָשׁ, of קְדוֹשׁ?***
 1. Something set apart, separate
 2. Something that has a special purpose
 3. Something to which we are completely devoted

SO WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT GOD IS SEPARATE, SET APART.

- ***Isn’t it true that God is everywhere, that we can pray to God wherever we are?***
- ***Is it also true, then, that if God is everywhere, God is in the rocks and in the trees and in the ocean and in the sky?*** [NO—BECAUSE GOD IS ONLY EVERYWHERE IN THE SENSE OF BEING ACCESSIBLE TO US, NOT ACTUALLY CONTAINED WITHIN THOSE THINGS.]

THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT GOD.

- God is *not* a part of the physical world in which we live.
- Our God—the Creator and Mastermind of everything we can see and touch and hear in the physical world, from the smallest cell of a living creature to the largest galaxy in the cosmos—is best described by a very unusual word: *incorporeal*.
- ***Does anyone have a digital dictionary handy to look up the meaning of that word?***
- The basic meaning is “not composed of matter.”

- Things not composed of matter we call “spiritual”—in other words, our God is not of the material world that we know.
- So God is *not* in the rocks and the trees, which is what *pagans* believe.
- FWIW, physicists and cosmologists, the scientists who try to figure out the how the creation in which we live was created, have admitted that they cannot explain how the universe was created from within our physical universe.

SINCE WE SAY THAT GOD IS קְדוֹשׁ, ANOTHER THING ABOUT GOD’S HOLINESS, IN ADDITION TO SEPARATENESS, IS THAT GOD SEEMS TO HAVE A *SPECIAL PURPOSE* RELATED TO US HUMAN BEINGS.

- ***Does anyone have any idea what God’s special purpose might be?***
- Well, since God is the only creator of life, we believe that God’s special purpose is to create and sustain life.
- ***What does it mean to “sustain” something.***
- When we sustain something, we make it possible for that thing to survive and thrive.
- ***What does God do that makes it possible for us to survive and thrive?***
 1. God created the earth as a “platform” that sustains human life with oxygen, plants, animals, minerals, etc.
 2. God created the Torah, which teaches us what we must do and not do to survive and thrive.
- ***Why do we say that God created the Torah, instead of some ordinary men, thousands of years ago?***
 1. Because the Torah teaches us, in ways anyone can understand, the laws that describe the difference between righteousness and wrongdoing, which make it possible for us to live together with truth and justice, freedom, peace, and compassion.
 2. In other words, the Torah is believed to be the plan that God had to create the *moral* order of creation because it accurately describes how the creation works—not physically, like what we know from scientific knowledge like physics and chemistry, but what we know from *moral* law which teaches us how we should act as human beings in God’s image.
 3. For example, the Torah teaches us not to lie and, for sure, the way the *moral* order of the creation works, lying leads to very bad outcomes.

THE NEXT TWO WORDS IN OUR PHRASE SAY, וְשִׁמְךָ קְדוֹשׁ—“AND YOUR NAME IS HOLY.”

- ***What’s your guess as to the number of Jewish names of God?***

- ***What are some of our names for God?***
 1. *Adonai* (אדני—Foundation)
 2. *Elohim* (אלהים—Judge)
 3. *Eil Shaddai* (אל שדי—All-sufficient God)
 4. *Eil Olam* (אל עולם—Eternal God)
 5. *Melech HaOlam* (מלך העולם—Eternal King)
 6. *Ish Milchama* (איש מלחמה—Man of War)
 7. *Hashem* (השם—the Name)
 2. *Eil Haoneh Oti* (אל הענה אתי—God Who Answered Me)
 3. *Y'chido shel Olam* (יחידו של עולם—The One of the World)
 4. *Kadmono shel Olam* (קדמונו של עולם—Original of the World)
 5. *Mikvei Yisrael* (מקוה ישראל—[Purifying] Fount of Israel)
 6. *Hagvurah* (הגבורה)—The Almighty)
 7. *Atik Yomin* (עתיק יומין)—Ancient of Days)
 8. *Eil Deiot* (אל דעות)—God of Thoughts: I Samuel 2:3
 9. *Mechaiyeh* (מחיה)—Giver of Life
 10. *Chai Echad* (חי אחד)—Living One)
 11. *Ro'eh Yisrael* (רועה ישראל)—Shepherd of Israel)
 12. *Adonai Tzevaot* (יהוה צבאות)—Lord of Hosts)
- ***How do you imagine God got so many different names?***
 1. People experienced God in many different ways in many different situations.
 2. ***Have you ever called out to God when you were in trouble or needed something very badly?***
 3. ***Could you give God a special name in those moments, like “God of my Hope?”***
 4. In Hebrew, that would be אֱלֹהֵי תִקְוָתִי.
- ***If God has all these different names, why does the סידור, our prayerbook, speak of “God’s name,” as if there’s only one name, which means to be holy?***
- ***Wouldn’t all of God’s names be holy?***
- This is a tricky question, and the answer is kind of complicated, so you have to pay attention to understand it.
 1. The Hebrew word for “name” is שֵׁם, spelled with the letters, ש and מ, which, as we just said, is one of God’s names, *Hashem*.
 2. But those same two Hebrew letters, ש and מ, with a different vowel, have another sound, *sham*, and a different meaning, which is the *place of a thing*.
 3. So when we call God “Hashem” we’re saying that God is the place where *something* comes from—and that something is holiness.
- ***But what is it that comes from God that’s holy?***

- When we say, וְשִׁמְךָ קָדוֹשׁ, “and Your Name is holy,” perhaps we’re thinking that our God is special because of what God created in us.
- ***What do you think God has created in us that is holy?***
 1. We can choose to be Righteous—to always do what’s right, without which there would be no truth;
 2. We can choose to be Truthful—to never lie, without which there would be no justice;
 3. We can choose to be Just—to treat everyone fairly, without which there would be no freedom;
 4. We can choose to be Free—to include everyone in our democracy, without which there will be no peace;
 5. We can choose to be Peaceful—to make every effort to avoid destructive conflict and war, without which there will be no kindness;
 6. We can choose to be Kind—to see that every one of us is a child of God, without which our lives become full of chaos and cruelty.

THE NEXT WORDS IN THE PHRASE, וְקְדוֹשִׁים בְּכָל-יוֹם יְהַלְלוּךָ, SAY, “AND THE HOLY ONES PRAISE YOU EVERY DAY.”

- ***Who do you think they are the “holy ones”—who is this prayer talking about?***
- *Possibly* all of us human beings!
- ***But if we’re to be holy, what makes us holy?***
- We can be holy in the moments we follow God’s example.

BUT WHAT EXACTLY DOES THAT REQUIRE OF US?

- ***What does it mean to be righteous?*** [DO THE RIGHT THING WHEN EVERYONE AROUND US IS DOING THE WRONG THING.]
- ***What does it mean to be truthful?*** [TO TELL THE TRUTH EVEN WHEN IT SHAMES AND EMBARRASSES US.]
- ***What does it mean to be just?*** [TREAT PEOPLE FAIRLY, EVEN WHEN WE DON’T HAVE TO OR IT’S NOT TO OUR ADVANTAGE.]
- ***How can we show our respect for freedom?*** [DON’T DENY IT TO OTHERS AND DON’T MISUSE IT WHEN WE HAVE IT.]
- ***How can we show our respect for peace?*** [DON’T INCITE PEOPLE TO FIGHT BUT INSTEAD HELP THEM SETTLE THEIR DIFFERENCES.]
- ***How can we show our desire for kindness?*** [BE GRATEFUL FOR KINDNESS SHOWN TO US AND SHOW KINDNESS TO OTHERS, ESPECIALLY PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE DON’T AGREE OR PARTICULARLY LIKE.]

**SO IF WE TRY TO DO ALL THESE THINGS AND IN SOME
SMALL WAY WE'RE HOLY LIKE GOD, HOW DOES THAT
PRAISE GOD?**

- The way we praise or bless God is by being a blessing ourselves, in the same way God is a blessing.
- So, for example, when we take God's example to be kind, and we're kind ourselves, we praise and bless God!

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