



Table Talk

Table Talk: Kedoshim

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We toss around the word “holy” a lot. In baseball, it’s Holy Cow! In the old Batman TV show, it was Holy Haberdashery! Holy Hailstorm! and Holy Hairdo!, to name just a few.

What does it mean? “Holy” comes from the Middle English *halig*, for whole. It’s usually defined as something made sacred by religious use or rule. A priest is called a holy person. A ceremony is a holy rite. Holy underwear is something else entirely.

We get a special perspective on holiness this week in *parashat Kedoshim*. Holiness, or *kedusha*, may be the most important principle in all of Judaism. It’s the highest ideal to which we aspire. “You shall be holy,” God says, “for I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

OK, sounds good, but only if we know what being holy means. *Kedoshim* tells us: Respect your parents. Observe the Sabbath. Don’t steal. Don’t lie. Help the poor and the hungry. Pay fair wages. Don’t slander. Treat others as you would want to be treated. And when you run into trouble following the rules, deal with it. Wrestle. Work it out. The greater the challenge, the greater the holiness.

All that makes it sound as if being a good person is the same as being holy. But didn’t we say three paragraphs ago that holiness is sacred and religious? (*Scrolls up and counts*) Yes, we did. That means God doesn’t expect us to be God. God doesn’t demand perfection. On the contrary, the Torah tells us that God is holy, we can be holy, too, and we can get there by working to be better people.

Holy guacamole! That sounds pretty reasonable.

At the Shabbat table tonight, don’t be holier-than-thou as you answer these questions:

1. What do the Ten Commandments and the laws of holiness have in common? How are they different?
2. The people who first received these laws of holiness were former Egyptian slaves. How did their recent experiences affect their perception of these laws?
3. It’s easy to see how these rules are mundane. But how are they also sacred? What role do they play in setting the people apart, in making them different, in making them a holy nation?