



May 11, 2024



Parshas Kedoshim

3rd of Iyar 5784

The Freest Man on the Face of the Earth

Every Friday night, at the Shabbos table, after welcoming the angels with Shalom Aleichem, we sing the song Eishes Chayil, an ode to the mothers of our home. Ever wonder why then? Why precisely at that moment do we turn to our wives and mothers and sing them Eishes Chayil? Why don't we sing it right after Havdalah? Or on Rosh Chodesh? Or on our mother's birthday? Are we merely thanking our mothers and wives for the beautiful Shabbos meal they've prepared, or is there something fundamentally deeper? This parshah gives us a clue.

After the Torah, in the very first pasuk, urges us to be holy, in almost the same breath, it tells us to revere our parents and safeguard Shabbos. What is the juxtaposition of the two? Why is the mitzvah to be holy immediately followed by the need to respect our parents and the commandment to make Shabbos paramount? Why not follow it with the importance of Yom Kippur or the severity of idolatry? Or better yet, why juxtapose anything at all? Just summon us to be holy. Plain and simple.

Owner's Manual for Spirituality

Rav Hirsch offers an amazing explanation of this. Hashem knew that we could never be holy in a world of unholiness without His instructing us on how to do so. Hence, He immediately tells us the two most effective ways of instilling and maintaining holiness in this world: our parents and Shabbos. The two most essential and powerful tools in the kedusha toolbox are a home with vibrant parents, and a home aglow with a radiant Shabbos. How so?

Each and every child walks a confusing path in their early years. What's up, what's down? What's right, what's wrong? What's saintly, what's devilish? What should we worship and what should we abhor? The outside world will point in a thousand directions. The home is a cocoon of clarity. The home is a cocoon of holiness. The home is where a

child can shut the door to the confusion of the outside world, and have parents, in a harmonious and pleasant environment, instill genuine purity within them. A home is where a child finds his two greatest advocates and his two greatest fans. He looks to his parents to see what Hashem wants from him. He looks to his parents to see how he should act. How he should think. How he should look at the world. Every word they say is cherished. Every kiss they give him is prized. Every tear of his they wipe away is another brick, building his soul. The world is confusing. Our parents are our link to Sinai, a time when the world finally got clarity.

If a ben sorer u'moreh was brought to court with only one parent, we declare him innocent. "Inadequate parental guidance led to this wayward child," the court declares. It is not his fault. He needed them and they weren't there. Our parents are our everything. Without them, we become susceptible to every spiritual illness lurking outside our doors.

What our parents are to us, Shabbos is to the Jewish people collectively. Shabbos is there when we busy ourselves with the mundane of the week. Shabbos is there to pick us up when we fall down. Shabbos is, for many, the only connector they have to holiness. It is the pipeline to infinity. If not for Shabbos, where would we be? Shabbos grabs our weekly money-making, pleasure-seeking, never-ending carousel and forces it to stop. It forces us to think. It forces us to connect to something bigger than ourselves. It gives us clarity in a world bereft of it.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Pe'ah, 3b) says that honoring and revering our parents is the hardest mitzvah in the Torah. To keep Shabbos properly is likewise one of the hardest mitzvos in the Torah. Yet we do it with love. For keeping it, keeps us. For sanctifying it, sanctifies us.

The Eleven-Hour Train Ride

I was once on an eleven-hour train ride traveling from Baltimore to Rochester. Early in my journey, a large, beefy man boarded the train and sat down right next to me. After a while he turned to me and asked, "Wanna hear my life story?"

Assuming that anyone offering to tell his life story to a complete stranger on a train must have quite the story to share, I replied, "Sure."

"Well," he said, "when I was a baby, my parents often stayed at high-end, expensive hotels. One night, while holding me near the bathtub, my father accidently dropped me into the boiling hot water. I got severely burned. After I

recovered, my parents excitedly sued the hotel chain for millions of dollars, which they promptly placed into the stock market in my name. Those millions turned into tens of millions, and when I was fifteen, I grabbed the money and ran. I ran so far from my parents I don't even know what country they live in anymore. I got married five times and got divorced each time. I couldn't be bogged down. I traveled the world over. Isn't that fascinating?"

I turned to him with a fake smile and said, "Totally. That is fascinating. So, what do you do now?"

"Now," he said, "I spend my life on the railroad traveling up and down the country, going wherever I feel like going. I stop off at any town I want and I check into the fanciest hotel, eat at the nicest restaurant, watch the town's best plays and then hop back on the train and do it all over again somewhere else."

I was amazed. But before I could ask any more questions, he looked outside and saw that we were pulling into a small town in the middle of Pennsylvania.

"I haven't tried this town yet." He got up to leave. As he was walking out of the train, he turned to me and said, "Well, now you know my life story. I live a life most people can only dream of. I am the freest man on the face of the earth." And with that, he walked off the train. Off into the little sleepy town.

No parents. No direction. Just his convoluted idea of freedom.

Every Friday night, after we welcome the Shabbos angels into our homes, we immediately turn to our mothers and say, "If not for you and your tireless safeguarding of our holiness, we might end up lost like that man chasing what the world calls freedom." If not for Shabbos, and if not for our parents, we would be aimlessly traveling down the spiraling railroad of life. Our parents breathe holiness into our homes. Shabbos breathes holiness into the world. Together, they grant us lives as truly the freest men on the face of the earth.