

Aspirational Holiness • Parshat Kedoshim

opens with a transformational idea: “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 19:2). Particularly inspiring is that God commands Moses to communicate this message to “all the community of Israel.” Despite the emphasis throughout Leviticus on the exclusive role of the priests, holiness is not just relegated to the elite. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks persuasively argues, we find here a “radical democratization of

In a profound and pithy response, refusing easy categorization, Rabbi Lichtenstein writes, “A Jew is also commanded to aspire.”

The relegation of holiness to the individual is both challenging and empowering. In this liminal space between choice and obligation, we are called

on to aspire for subjective self-discipline and heightened ethical sensitivity. The Torah does not provide us precise details, and thereby affords us the autonomy, responsibility, and opportunity, for transformational and individualized moral refinement.

C D H C A G J E A C
C B J C

Character Challenge: Choose an area where self-control is more challenging for you and aspire to “be holy” or to do “what is right and good” by acting beyond the level of obligation.

Quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l: “It is the people as a whole who are commanded to “be holy”, not just an elite group of priests... What we witness here, in other words, is the radical democratization of holiness. All ancient societies had priests...The priesthood was not unique to Israel, and everywhere it was an elite. Here for the first time, we find a code of holiness directed to the people as a whole. We are all called on to be holy” (“From Priest to People,” *C C*).