

D'var Torah on Parshat Acharei Mot/Kidoshim

By Rabbi Gewirtz

What are we to make of G-d's seemingly preposterous expectation of us contained in the first verse of Parshat Kidoshim?

קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱ-לֹהֵיכֶם

You shall be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.

Having Michael Phelps as a swim coach does not create expectations that all his students will be olympic superstars! They don't have his DNA!

The commentaries explain that the human soul, called "*Neshama*" (*Divine Breath*) because it allows us to be "*B'tzelem Elokim*" (*G-d's Image*) can be developed to emulate Divine attributes in microcosm. We are not only G-d's students when we study and practice His Torah, we also possess, in a small way, His spiritual DNA.

Awareness of our vast spiritual potential is essential to our realizing it. Not only must we keep our "eyes on the prize", we must be confident that we can get it!

Maintaining an awareness of our potential greatness is a challenging task. Even Adam, the first "Soul possessing human being" found it challenging. After eating the forbidden fruit he is told by G-d that...

*"(the cursed earth) will cause thorns and thistles to grow for you, and **you shall eat the grass of the field.**"*
In the next verse, G-d continues...

*"With the sweat of your face **you shall eat bread...**"*

The Midrash notices the inconsistency. Will mankind now eat "the grass of the field", or "bread"?

The Midrash answers that when Adam was told that he would eat the "grass of the field", he began to cry. He told G-d that he would not be able to maintain his "created in G-d's image" self-image, if he ate like an animal! In response, G-d altered the human diet so that it be distinguished from that of an animal.

My teacher, Rabbi Henach Leibowitz ztz"l observed that had human beings been satisfied with the initial grass "fast food" diet, there would have been time for many more *mitzvot*, Torah study, and prayer. The implication of this Midrash is that the tradeoff would not have been worth it! Apparently, our "self-expectations" dictate how much our *mitzvot*, Torah study, and prayer develop us!

The verse at the beginning of Parshat Kidoshim is not just a reason for our being able to be "holy" and emulate G-d. It is giving us the confidence and self-awareness, without which, we would not be able to do so.