[**The Bakery – Parshat Kedoshim**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-bakery-parshat-kedoshim)

The other day a friend told me a story about when he lived in Israel back in the eighties. He rented a room in a small apartment with only one bathroom and a tiny kitchen from a very poor family. So, he would use the bathroom at the men’s*mikveh* down the street and eat most of his meals out in order to not be in their way. When he would sometimes come home late at night, he entered from the fire escape so as not to wake them up.

He worked for the newly formed Israeli Ministry of the Environment and day after day he would catch the same bus to work, at the same time every morning. On his way to the bus, he would always stop at the same Arab bakery, and get the same breakfast which was essentially a big flat sesame bagel with an egg baked into the center of it.

One day he stopped in for his usual breakfast, but the Arab baker (who was usually incredibly warm and friendly to him) behaved coldly and completely ignored him. My friend tried to get his attention several times to let him know he was there was ready to order his usual breakfast… but the baker completely ignored him. Frustrated and confused, he left the bakery and headed to the bus.

As he waited for the bus to arrive, he realized that he was really hungry, and that he wouldn’t make it through to lunch time if he didn’t eat something. So, he made a dash for a little food cart to buy a sack of pumpkin seeds. When he got to the food cart, another person rudely cut the line in front of him. He was now doubtful if he could make it back to the bus in time, but he was really hungry, so he waited for the line-cutter to get served, and then ordered his snack as fast as he could.

He paid for the food and made a dash back to the bus stop, but to his dismay, the bus had just left without him. His heart sank as he watched the bus drive away up and over the hill. Suddenly, he was startled by an ear shattering boom. The bus had exploded just after going over the crest – many of those on the front of the bus, where he would have been, were killed.

Days later, when the initial shock had faded a bit, my friend went back to the Arab baker, who was completely friendly again. My friend asked him if he had been upset with him for some reason, looking to find out why he had acted with such rudeness that day... a rudeness that had literally saved his life. The baker said he didn’t know what he was talking about – “You’re my friend! Why would I do that to you?”

This is a true story.

When we hear miraculous stories like this, there can be an impulse to try to make sense of it, to fit it into some belief system, to draw conclusions from it… but if there is something to learn from this kind of experience, it should be: *don’t draw conclusions; don’t try to fit things into your belief system.*

When someone is rude to us, when people behave in a way that triggers our judgment, that draws us into some mental/emotional drama, don’t judge. Don’t interpret. The rude man in the bakery could be saving your life. The guy who cut in front of you in line could be saving your loved ones. The point is not to make up some story like this, *the point is to really know that you don’t know.*

The thinking mind wants to know, it wants to understand, and that’s understandable! Of course, we must do our best to understand to make the best decisions we can. But all of our understanding is incomplete and even dangerous unless we also understand that we don’t really know for sure; we are inherently uncertain, and there is always much, much, much more going on that we can ever really know.

This deep knowing of not-knowing brings us into connection with the one thing *we really do know* – the only thing we actually know – which is that there is consciousness; there is an experience happening, right now.

This experience, right now, is unfolding within this mystery that we call awareness, and the awareness is ultimately what we are, beneath the thoughts, beneath the feelings, beneath whatever situation we find ourselves in. It is our true identity; we are not merely bodies, or personalities, or memories, conditioning, opinions, merits and faults, or personal stories – we are the open space of knowing, the vast field of awareness within which all these things are now living.

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו, אֵימָתָי
*He used to say, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”*

This little aphorism of the famous sage Hillel, which is often understood only on an ethical level, actually contains a formula for discovering our deepest identity:

*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? –*It is up to us to realize who we really are; no one can do it for us. We do it by noticing that there is, in a sense, two of “me” – the “me” that is made out of my body and mind and feelings, and the “I” that perceives all that. Which “me” am “I”?

*And if I am for myself, what am I? –*“I” am not the self that I perceive – the body, the thoughts, the feelings – rather, “I” am the awareness that perceives all of that.

*And if not Now, when? –*The way to know this for yourself is to simply come into connection with the Now; to be the awareness that simply receives whatever is present. Then, you will come to know yourself *as* that awareness, *as* that Presence. And, paradoxically, everything you perceive is *also* Presence.

There is a hint at the very beginning of the *parshah:*

קְדֹשִׁ֣ים תִּהְי֑וּ כִּ֣י קָד֔וֹשׁ אֲנִ֖י יְהוָ֥ה אֱלֹהֵיכֶֽם
*Be holy, for I, the Divine, am holy.*

Holy, *kadosh,*means “separate,” or better, “transcendent.” The true “I” is the awareness that transcends what it perceives, and this “I” is not *your* “I” but is the “I” of the Divine; it is the “I” of Reality Itself, knowing Itself through you – that’s our spiritual potential! It’s not only that we become free when we realize that we are not the ordinary “I” we thought we were, but rather, God wakes up to Itself; we play our part in Existence awakening to Itself.

A disciple of Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezritch, started home after studying with the Maggid for many years. On his way he stopped in Karlin to see his old friend Rabbi Aaron, who had once been his learning companion in the Maggid’s House of Study. It was already midnight by the time he arrived in the city, but he was so excited to see his old friend, he made his way to Rabbi Aaron’s house anyway. When he arrived, he could see light coming from the window, so he looked in and saw his friend learning from books at the table by candlelight. Excited to see his old friend, he knocked on the window enthusiastically.

Rabbi Aaron looked up from his books: “Who is there?”

“It is I!” exclaimed the disciple.

Rabbi Aaron looked back down at his books and continued studying. The student waited a bit, then knocked again, and again, but no reply. “Aaron, why don’t you open the door for me?”

Rabbi Aaron looked up and spoke with grave seriousness: “Who is it that dares to call himself “I” as befits only the Divine?”

When the disciple heard this, he realized that he had not learned nearly enough, so he immediately turned around and headed back toward Mezrich…

**More on Kedoshim...**

[**Separate- Parshat Akharei Mot, Kedoshim**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/separate-parshat-akharei-mot-kedoshim)
5/3/2017  [1 Comment](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/separate-parshat-akharei-mot-kedoshim#comments)***​

"Kedoshim tihyu ki kadosh ani Hashem Eloheikhem-
"Holy you shall be, because holy am I, Hashem your God.”***

There’s something strange about this passage. God is telling the children of Israel that they should be holy without really explaining what that means, and then it says that the reason they should be holy because God is holy- *ki kadosh ani Hashem Eloheikhem*. So the question is, why does one follow from the other? Why should we be holy just because God is holy, and what does holy mean anyway?

The word for holy, *Kadosh,*actually means “separate,” but not in the ordinary sense. Normally, the word “separate” connotes distance, disconnectedness, or alienation, such as when a relationship goes sour and you lose that connection with another person. But the word *kadosh*actually means the opposite. In a Jewish wedding ceremony, for example, we hear these words spoken between the beloveds-

*“At me****kudesh****et li-*
*“You are holy to me…”*

Meaning, your beloved becomes *kadosh*or “separate” not because they’re separate from you, but because they’re exclusive to you. They’re your *most*intimate, and therefore *separate*from all other relationships. So, the separateness of *kadosh*points not to something that’s distant, but to something that’s most central. It points not to alienation, but to the deepest connection. And just as your beloved is separate from all other relationships, so too when you become present, this moment becomes separate from all other moments, and you’re able to get some distance from the world of time- from your memories about the past and your anticipations of the future. This allows you to experience yourself not as a bundle of thoughts and feelings inhabiting a body, but as the open, radiant space of awareness within which your thoughts and feelings come and go. That’s why your presence, your awareness is by its nature *kadosh-*separate from the world of thought and feeling within which we tend to get trapped, yet fully and intimately connected with everything that arises in this moment.

So when God says *kedoshim tihyu-*you should be holy- it’s telling you to do the practice of holiness by becoming present- by separating your mind from the entanglements of thought and time. How is it possible for us to get free from time? *Ki kadosh ani Hashem Eloheikhem*- because the holiness of Being- *Hashem-* is already your own inner Divinity- *Eloheikhem.*In other words, by practicing presence, you bring forth your own deepest nature, which is holiness.

This is also hinted at in the name of *Parshat Akharei Mot,*which means “after the death.” In order to know your own deepest nature as *shamayim mima’al,*the vastness of space, you have to let go of your mind-based identity- all your stories and judgments about yourself, and that can actually feel like a kind of death. But this death has an *Akhar-*an afterward in which your true life, the awareness that you are, becomes liberated.

So on this Shabbat *Akharei Mot* and *Kedoshim* may we come to know more deeply the holiness that is felt after the death of the false self, and may we express that holiness as love and blessing to everyone we encounter.

Good Shabbos!

[**The Pie- Parshat Kedoshim**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-pie-parshat-kedoshim)

It was Mother’s Day this past week.

I looked for a nice picture to post on Facebook. I found one from my birthday a couple years ago with me and my mother. I was eating some chocolate pecan pie she had made for me. (And always makes for me on my birthday- thanks Mom!)

After I posted it, I was looking at the picture. There was something funny about the expression on my face. Then, it struck me- the particular way I was smiling and looking into the camera looked just like my father.

There’s so much that’s passed on from parent to child- not just genetics, knowledge and language, but also mannerisms and patterns of behavior.

And some of these patterns, alas, are ones we perhaps could do without. Have you ever been critical of some behavior in your parents, and then caught yourself unconsciously acting exactly the same way?

And, its not their fault! Patterns of thought, speech and behavior have been passed down through the generations for ages.

When you become aware of this, there’s a tremendous opportunity for transforming not just your own patterns, but the patterns of those who came before you. As you awaken to your deeper potential, there’s redemption for your ancestors as well.

As it says in this week’s reading:

*“Ish imo v’aviv tira’u…*
*“You shall revere your mother and your father…”*

The word here for “revere”- *tira’u-* has the double meaning of both “revere” or “respect” as well as “fear.” In other words, you should “fear” your potential to perpetuate the negative qualities of your parents, and “revere” them by emulating their positive qualities and transforming the negative ones within yourself!

And this is the call of this week’s *parsha*- to awaken your potential for holiness- your potential for the expression of integrity, truth, compassion, gratitude, and all the other *middot*(spiritual qualities):

*“Kedoshim tihyu ki kadosh ani Hashem Elohekhem…”*
*“You shall be holy, for I- Divine Being, your own Divinity- am holy…”*

Holiness is intrinsic to who you are- it’s your own inner Divinity. It calls upon you to craft your garments of expression- your thoughts, words and actions- into expressions of the Truth of who you are.

How do you do that?

This *parsha*contains many beautiful prescriptions for expressing holiness:

*“You shall not steal… you shall not lie… You shall not curse the deaf, nor place a stumbling block before the blind… You shall not favor the poor, nor honor the great... You shall not go around gossiping… you shall not hate others in your heart…you shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge… You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

According to the Talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva, this last *mitzvah- “Love your neighbor as you love yourself- ve’ahavta l’reiakha kamokha*”- is the essence of the whole Torah.

But to really become aware of your unconscious negative patterns, to really get free from them and choose to embody the *middot*of love and integrity, *there needs to be space*. The suffering of life is too great for one to remain present and aware without a break from its momentum. Perhaps that’s why the verse about revering one’s parents concludes with the words:

*“V’et Shab’totai tishmoru-*
*“My Sabbaths you shall guard…”*

In the stillness, you can recover from the patterns of suffering and reconnect with your inner wellspring of holiness. From that place, you can remain open to whatever suffering arises without losing yourself in it.

There’s a story about Reb Mordechai Dov of Hornisteipl, that once he visited a doctor for a painful sore on his back.

The doctor decided the best thing to do would be to cauterize it. In those days, this would involve heating up three metal rods, each one hotter than the last.  If the patient didn’t cry out with the first hot rod, they would apply the second. And in the rare occasion the patient didn’t respond to the second one, a third super hot rod was ready.

The only problem was, this *tzaddik*was accustomed to accepting pain in silence, not losing his inner connection regardless of how much he suffered.

So, when the doctor applied the first hot rod and got no reaction from Reb Mordechai Dov, he went on to the second rod. Still no reaction. When he applied the third white hot rod and the *tzaddik* still didn’t respond, the doctor exclaimed- “I don’t know whether this is an angel or a demon!”

Reb Mordechai Dov didn’t understand Russian, so he asked the translator to tell him what the doctor said. When he was told, he answered:

“Please tell the doctor that when someone comes to me and asks that I pray on their behalf, and I see that I won’t be able to relieve their suffering with my prayers, it hurts much much more than these hot rods… and even then, I must not lose myself.”

On this *Shabbat Kedoshim,* the Sabbath of Holiness, may we become aware of our true potential and practice it in real time. May we reconnect with the Source of that potential, the infinite wellspring of holiness within- the holy awareness that looks though your eyes and hears through your ears, in this moment. ​