At The Center of Everything - Be Holy
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We spend a lot of our lives on the edges of things.

On the edges of conversations.
On the edges of relationships.
On the edges of our own commitments.

But Judaism keeps pulling us back to the center. To the *ikar*. To what matters most.

Every system has a center.
In physics, it's the center of gravity.
In a story, it's the moment everything turns.
In an Oreo, it's the cream filling.

And in Torah, there is a center too.

The book of Leviticus, the third book of the Torah sits at the heart of the Five Books of Moses.

And right at the center of Leviticus is the portion we read tomorrow: *Kedoshim*.

And at the center of *Kedoshim* is a single, audacious line:

Kedoshim tihyu ki kadosh ani Adonai Eloheichem.

You shall be holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy.

That is the center of the center.

But what does it mean to be holy?

We are usually taught that holiness means separation.

That which is holy is set apart.
Distinct. Reserved.

Shabbat is *kodesh*, separated from the rest of the week. The Jewish people are called an *am kadosh*, a people set apart.

Holiness, we are told, is about drawing boundaries.

But if you listen carefully to the language of our tradition, something surprising happens.

The very same root, the same word, keeps appearing not where we separate… but where we bind ourselves to one another.

Think about the moments in Jewish life when we use this language.

At the Passover Seder, we sit surrounded by family, by friends, by the people who make up our lives. We tell our story. We argue. We laugh. We remember. We belong.

And we lift a cup of wine and recite a prayer of sanctification.

Kiddush.

But it isn't the wine that is holy.

It is the circle around the table.
The relationships.
The shared story.

Gathering itself becomes holy.

At a wedding, we use the same language.

Kiddushin.

Two individuals, separate lives, separate histories, choose to bind themselves to one another. A ring, whole and unbroken, is placed on a finger.

Harei at mekudeshet li.
With this ring, you are make holy to me. There is that word, kadosh again.

Holiness here is not separation.
It is connection.
It is the courage to open the self and make space for another.

And when someone we love dies, we do something equally remarkable.

We do not retreat into isolation.
We stand. Together.

And we say *Kaddish*.

Not a prayer about death, but a prayer about life.
About the refusal to let love disappear.
About the insistence that memory itself is sacred.

Kiddush.
Kiddushin.
Kaddish.

Different moments. One idea.

Holiness is not only about what we set apart.
It is about what we draw together.

It is about the bonds we create, the circles we form, the ways we refuse to live alone.

Each of us lives inside a circle of concern.

For some, that circle is very small.
It barely extends beyond the self.

For others, it widens. To family. To friends.

For some, it stretches further still. To community. To people they may never meet.

And then there is God.

The ultimate circle of concern.
A presence that holds all life within it.

*Kedoshim tihyu. Key kadosh ani Adonai
Be holy. Because I God am holy

Which is to say: live more like that, more Godly. Widen your circle. Care for others as God cares for you and so many more than just you.

But we are still not quite at the very center of the Torah.

Just a few verses after this command to be holy like God, at the literal center of the whole Torah we encounter what may be its greatest moral teaching:

V'ahavta l're'acha kamocha.
Love your neighbor as yourself.

Rabbi Akiva called it a *klal gadol baTorah*, a foundational principle of the entire Torah.

Because this is the direction of a holy life.

To move outward.
To include more.
To care more deeply.
To refuse the narrowness of a life lived only for oneself.

Over these past days, we have felt what it means to live inside different circles.

On Yom HaShoah, we remembered our own people. The pain that still shapes us.

On Yom HaZikaron, we felt the cost of a nation. The lives given so others might live.

And on Yom HaAtzmaut, we celebrated the miracle of Jewish sovereignty, the possibility of a shared future.

Each day asking us, in its own way:
How wide is your circle?

How much can you hold?

What is holy?

You are holy.
Created *b’tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God.

What is more holy?

This.
A community that chooses to gather, to care, to show up for one another.

A *kehilah kedoshah*. A holy community.

And what might be holiest of all
is what happens when we carry this community and its values beyond these walls.

When we widen the circle.
When we refuse to live small lives.
When we take seriously the Torah's call.

Kedoshim tihyu.

To become holy
by becoming more connected, more responsible, more open to one another.

Because the closer we move toward one another,

the closer we move toward God.