KEDOSHIM – YOU SHALL BE HOLY

If someone were to ask you "Are you a holy person?" how would you respond? Most of us don't usually think of ourselves as holy people, but in the context of this week's parashah, the question is not only meaningful, it is also crucial.

The parashah begins with an exhortation to be holy as God is holy and then lists the ways we can become so. Right in the very middle of the Torah scroll, we find a set of instructions on how to be holy. It is a biblical code of conduct known as the "Holiness Code." It begins with respect for our parents and our God and then proceeds to laws governing our relationship with our fellow human beings. We are instructed not to insult the deaf nor to place a stumbling block before the blind. We are commanded to be fair in our judgments and in our business dealings.

Look at and discuss list

For me it is interesting and important to note that being holy is not defined by synagogue attendance or by outward signs of piety. Nor is it a matter of ritual practice or personal attitude. Holiness can be found only in our relationships with other people. It is revealed when we are just and compassionate. It is manifest when we are respectful of others and ethical in our behavior.

Many people struggle with the relevancy of religion in our modern world. They advocate a spiritual life but not a religious one. What is the difference?

In my experience spirituality is religion on your own terms. It makes no demands upon you or requires no sacrifice or

curtailing of desired behavior. Spirituality is mindfulness and thoughtfulness but always within your comfort zone.

Religion takes you out of your comfort zone. Religion makes demands and places expectations on you, particularly about things that human beings find difficult.

- Abstaining, fasting, interacting, delaying

Where spirituality leads to meaning, religion leads to holiness. A higher level of meaning that we would be unlikely to achieve or even pursue if not prodded and provoked by our religious tradition.

What's the difference? Spirituality depends on you, Religion depends on you and a relationship with a power greater than yourself. Religion requires GOD.

Someone once gave me a working definition of GOD. When asked who or what is GOD. They answered me that GOD is an acronym, G-O-D, GOD stands for Good Orderly Direction. A high code or operating system than even our own best intentions.

What does it mean to be holy? It means to aspire to that ideal, to be deserving of such a lofty association as to be God-like, to be Holy for I the Lord Your God and Holy.

So, how would you respond to the question: Are you a holy person?

Do you want to be? How do you plan to get there?