

Sparks

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Achieving Sacred Selfishness Happiness through holiness

I had a student that once came into my office and said, "My father who passed away was an atheist and a fantastic human being. He was such a moral human being. He was such a good human being. I don't believe that had he been a believer, he would have been any better. He was the epitome of being a good person. So I have a problem with Torah because I really don't believe that it would have made a difference."

So I told him that it isn't the goal of Torah to merely become a moral person. There is a lot more to it.

Morality is important, but morality is a stage in the journey. The destination is holiness — being whole.

Morality is an aspect of that, but it is not that.

So I asked him, "Do you think your father might have been more holy?" That shocked him, he never even thought about holiness. What is holiness? According to the Torah, the ultimate goal of life is holiness.

Holiness is what we are here to do. The meditation that is recited prior to the performance of a *mitzvah* (religious duty) is "Blessed Be You, G-d ... Who has made me holy through the commandments." It says holy. Not good. Not more moral. Now, of course, if a person is holy, she will be more moral and more good, but one must differentiate between the objectives and the goal.

Morality is — without question — a very serious step on the ladder but it is not the final rung in our ladder. Rather we aspire to holiness. Holiness is ultimate wholeness which has nothing of the weakness of morality.

Often people's morality comes out of weakness. They don't do the right thing because they want to. They do it because of a social consensus which they are afraid to violate. If they were to violate it, they would be considered politically incorrect, socially unacceptable, and maybe even punished.

Now if that is the foundation of morality, then morality is in big trouble. Then morality is weakness. It's giving in.

If morality is simply a function of what the community decided on is good, and you just go with the flow, then you are weak. You are afraid not to conform, not to be different, and you are willing to chuck your values (should they be different than the social consensus) because you're scared. Is that morality?

Holiness has none of the weakness of morality. Holiness is the ultimate wholeness. Holiness is not surrendering to society's consensus, but asserting my "self" with the strength of being connected to the Great Self—G-d.

And you know what the irony is? When I act out of ultimate wholeness, I am really being selfish. My goodness to you is very selfish because you are a part of my self. How can I not be good to you? How can my right hand not be good to my left hand? We are part of the same whole.

Here is another irony: Morality wants you to be selfless. It wants you to overcome your selfishness, because only then can you surrender to the social standard. But is that realistic? People are selfish. Morality, without holiness, is heading for bankruptcy.

See, there are two kinds of selfishness. There is holy selfishness and there is unholy selfishness. Unholy selfishness is when I experience myself as separate from you and therefore, I exploit you for my personal little needs. Holy selfishness is when I would never exploit you, because you are so much a part of myself, and we are so much a part of the Great Self — we are whole in One. Hurting you is hurting myself. Hurting my self is hurting you. I wouldn't do it. This is a high level of selfishness. This is not a bad selfishness. This is a beautiful selfishness. This isn't weakness. This is strength. This is the power of self. Holy selfishness flows from your connection to the Great Self—the I am G-d.

Should vs. Want To

"Let's take an example. Sherry and Judy are walking down the street. They see this old man dressed in ragged clothing. He clearly hasn't had a shower in weeks. It doesn't take a genius to figure out his life is not a picnic. So both Sherry and Judy dig deep in their pockets and each one pulls out ten bucks, and they each give it to him.

Sherry did an act of morality and Judy did an act of holiness.

Morality is motivated by social conditioning, social approval, perhaps guilt and embarrassment of how much I have; maybe a hope that what goes around comes around, maybe a desire to protect my own wealth and, perhaps a hope for some reward. For Sherry, it's worth the sacrifice.

And all of that is great, but holiness is more.

Holiness is motivated by the deepest source of my "self." It is a natural, spontaneous uncalculated expression of "self," without consideration of reward or punishment. It is self evident. If I saw myself on the street, I would give to myself. Well, Judy just saw an aspect of herself on the street. And of course, she gave.

This is what the Talmud means when it says, "The reward of the *mitzvah* is the *mitzvah*." The reward of being yourself is being yourself.

Now Sherry's morality is great. Sherry's morality is a step toward holiness and is included within holiness, but holiness is much greater.

Holiness, as the Torah sees it, is not about simply becoming a better human being. And a lot of people don't understand that. They say, "I never hurt anybody. I'm a good person. That's the only thing that counts."

Being good is the objective of Torah, but being holy is its ultimate goal.

In the Torah, G-d says "You shall be holy for I am holy."

You can be more than just good. You can be whole. You can soar. You can experience being holy deeply connected to all and one with the All of All — Whole in One.

When you understand the Torah's outlook on life and unity and true identity, then you realize that holiness has none of the possible weaknesses in morality, posing an unreasonable demand on man to be selfless, telling him to eradicate selfishness from his heart. Holiness recognizes that my selfishness may come from a higher place, a place of Oneness.

The key here is true self love which is rooted in the Soul of all Souls — G-d — the Great Self.

False self love is not a love of self at all, it is love of ego. When you love your ego you are really hating yourself. You are ripping yourself off from the source of all.

Imagine two leaves looking at each other on a tree. One thinks the other one is a real jerk. The other one says, "Well, I don't really like your face either. You're green."

"Who are you calling green, Man? You're just as green as me."

What they don't realize is that they are connected to one twig, which is connected to one branch, which is connected to one trunk, which is connected to one root.

And so these two leaves are living an illusion that somehow they are against each other when in fact in the deepest place of the deepest place, they are all connected.

And so too we are all connected. We are not the same. I am not you. You are not me. And yet we are one.

Deep down inside we know that. Holiness takes us to the peak of ourselves, to the apex where all selves meet, where the more you love your self in this true sense, the more you love G-d and everyone else.

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