

Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah - Kedoshim

Growing up, some of the worst jokes I ever heard spawned from the mouth of one of the "craziest crusaders" who, in my humble opinion, is the lamest super hero of all time. Robin, the "boy wonder" lived in a world of religious amazement. If you were a fan of the Adam West / Burt Ward "television" of the comic strip, you already know where this is going. As Batman came to each episode's epiphanic moment of figuring out the next move of the criminal of the week, or when the caped crusaders found themselves in the clutches of a villainous trap, Robin would demonstrate his faith by assuming that all things good and bad come from God. Actual such quotes from shows include (but unfortunately are not limited to): "Holy mother of jokes!" "Holy molars! Am I ever glad I take good care of my teeth!" "Holy semantics, Batman. You never cease to amaze me!" "Holy haberdashery, Batman!" Most pertinent to us, Robin declared our Constitution to be a sacred document, "Holy Bill of Rights, Batman!" Those who believe in Bible codes might even argue that Batman and Robin (or at least just Robin) were predicted in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah says, "Holy, holy, holy is Adonai of hosts," and no one else, but Robin could use the word "holy" that many times in one sentence.

In all candor, "holy" is a word we throw around a whole lot, yet, in asking people what it means, I get a lot of blank stares. I first get the knee jerk response, "What do you mean, 'what does holy mean?'" What follows is a moment of awkward silence broken with, "It's about God!" This is about as far as it goes, or I get the next worst series of jokes that have to do with religious underwear – "holey."

We get the word from the Torah. In particular, this week's Torah portion includes what we call the "Holiness Code." You shall be holy, for I, God, am holy." In all, we are commanded to figure out a way to act like God would act. At some level, I do think that God has a sense of humor, but I refuse to believe becoming a comedian is the real purpose of this command. What makes this so difficult is the fact that, at best, defining what God is or is not is an act of faith ... or arrogance (depending on one's definition). Deciding then, how God wants us to act is, perhaps, impossible to know for sure. And, maybe that is the beauty of this faith journey. Being supplied with too many answers serves only to diminish the value of the journey. It would be like doing a crossword puzzle engaging the answer sheet more often than the brain. Whatever God is, I do believe God is a whole lot bigger and more complex than anything I can comprehend. What I think I know is that there are behaviors to which we subscribe that seem to make sense in moving the whole world forward, some that move only part of it forward, and others that serve only to hurt and destroy the world. If I am going to give God credit for creating the world (even by big bang and evolution), then I have to believe that *imitatio dei* (imitating God) is found in doing the work that brings further healing to the breaches and pain that exists throughout the world. The Talmud (Sotah 14a) teaches us that the lessons of our tradition (Torah) demonstrate God doing things that we have to emulate (for example clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and comforting the bereaved).

Even this assessment, though, is not without controversy. One of the major controversies over which we struggle is in trying to figure out whether what we believe is good is really good for all or just for some. In the same sense that Robin is the too squeaky clean "do gooder (even the use of the moniker "caped crusader" is difficult to take seriously), I believe those who claim to have all answers for everyone ("holier than thou") remove themselves from this world and firmly ensconce themselves in the realm of

fiction.” When we openly engage in what we think is the best answer – with ears willing and open to hear each other – this is where I think we enter the realm of holiness. Holiness is not a state of being, rather it is a term of engagement. I do not think one is holy because of which side of an argument they are on or not on. I do not think that one is holy if they practice one religion or another. I know lots of folks who do a lot of religious practicing, yet who do not engage others in any positive way. Kedoshim ti-h’yu – You shall be holy. The command is not tied to a political party; holiness transcends politics, citizenship, and even religion. Ultimately, the Bible text does not even say that one has to believe in God to be holy. Holiness is tied to a commitment to engage in ways that allow for meaningful growth for you and for the one with whom you engage. It is found in one’s volunteer work at hospitals or with children. Holiness is the act of sharing a meal with a close friend, or listening with intention to the feelings of one in distress, or in finding a way to tell someone you love that you do love them. May we be blessed with each other’s commitment to holiness, as we provide these blessings and this commitment, as well. Shabbat Shalom.