



3 Iyar 5784 | May 11, 2024

## **Kedoshim: You Will Grow!** **Rabbi Emily Goldberg Winer, Class of 2022**

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*This week, we revisit a d'var torah written by graduate Rabbi Emily Goldberg Winer in 2022.*

On my coffee table sits a small framed photo of a wholesome encounter between two plants. One is a meager bud and the other is a flower in full bloom, reassuring the sproutling beside it in big letters, “You will grow!” This tiny comic encapsulates our project as Jewish people, one that originated in this week’s *Parshat* Kedoshim.

This *parsha* opens with the framing from God: “You will become holy for I God am holy.” The future-tense language is intentional; holiness, like all facets of the human experience, is a process. It is not the means to an end, but the end in itself. It’s a conscious choice we must make, an aspiration of who we can each become. It is when we see ourselves as finished products that we learn just how far we have to go.

In an almost discouraging way, this *parsha* states this ideal of becoming holy and then lists the myriad barriers to achieving this goal. I want to focus on two of those that are tied together in one *pasuk*:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against members of your people. Love your fellow as yourself: I am God (Vayikra 19:18).

Perhaps *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is far too busy to be spending time on the subways of Manhattan during rush hour in the summer months, but this one-breath command to release our angst and love others fully feels particularly rough sometimes. It can really be challenging in the day-to-days of each of our complicated, process-filled lives to emulate the ideals of this *pasuk* when we are annoyed or feel unjustifiably wronged. It’s far easier to shove back another passerby, return a passive aggressive text with more snark, to meet someone’s scowl with a frown. The mere feeling of righteous indignation, of having the last word or glance, is the epitome of what the Sifra describes as bearing a grudge:

...this is called “bearing a grudge (*natirah*)” because he retains (*nutar*) enmity in his heart although he does not actually avenge himself (Sifra, Kedoshim, Chapter 4 10-11; Yoma 23a).

This heavy anger we carry toward others is unproductive at best. It is not the action of seeking retribution but simply the thought of doing so that gets debilitating over time. In the holding of that frustration and resentment, we become their backpacks. We travel from place to place with pent up grudges whose weight only we can feel. It reminds me of a story inspired from the Zen Buddhist tradition, but allow me the liberty of changing two of the character identities:

A *rebbe* and his *talmud* were traveling together. At one point, they came to a river with a strong current. As the *rebbeim* were preparing to cross the river, they saw a very young and beautiful woman also attempting to cross. The young woman asked if they could help her cross to the other side. The two rabbis glanced at one another because of *shmirat negiah*—they could not touch a woman. Then, without a word, the *rebbe* picked up the woman, carried her across the river, placed her gently on the other side, and carried on his journey. The *talmud* couldn't believe what had just happened. After rejoining his companion, he was speechless, and an hour passed without a word between them. Two more hours passed, then three, finally the *talmud* couldn't contain himself any longer, and blurted out "As men, we are not permitted to touch a woman, how could you then carry that woman on your shoulders?" The *rebbe* looked at him and replied, "My student, I set her down on the other side of the river, why are you still carrying her?"

"Do not bear a grudge (*titur*) on your people." The word *titur* can also translate to "guard." In carrying our frustrations, we are masking our own vulnerabilities in exchange for a fleeting feeling of justice. In accessing anger, we avoid the far more difficult process of unpacking the feelings of loss we may be experiencing beneath it. Grudges function as guards that block the human processes of naming our hurts and frustrations and, ideally, moving to loving God's people—even in their mistakes or rush hour snark.

Bearing a grudge is the direct barrier to loving a neighbor as oneself. Carrying backpacks of anger prevents the sharing of communal burdens. When we are each so transfixed on holding grudges, we are actually withholding our true selves from the very people who need to understand us the most. Those people who give us reasons to feel annoyed miss out on our process of becoming holy and God-like when we carry anger over love. Perhaps we ourselves will miss it too. The Gemara in Masechet Sanhedrin declares the losses that bearing grudges cause:

Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: With regard to anyone who withholds *halakha* from being studied by the mouth of a student who seeks to study Torah, it is as though he robs him of the inheritance of his ancestors, as it is stated: "Moses commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:4), indicating that



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the Torah is an inheritance for all of the Jewish people from the six days of Creation (Masechet Sanhedrin 91b).

This Shabbat, I invite you to take off your backpacks. Gain the sense of completeness that comes with forgiving the deep feelings you have rather than burying them beneath resentful grudges. Remind yourself in those rush hour traffic moments that “You will grow!!” And in that process of becoming our holy and wholly selves, may you love your neighbors like yourselves, and yourselves like your neighbors.

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