

Parshat Mishpatim:
“And You Shall Be a Holy People to Me”: Holiness in Parshat Mishpatim
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Holiness is not a topic one would expect to find in a parsha filled with the intricacies of civil law.

Yet, the Torah tells us

<p>You shall be a holy people to Me: you must not eat flesh torn by beasts in the field you shall cast it to the dogs (JPS translation Shemot 22:30)</p>	<p>ואנשי קדש תהיון לי ובשר בשדה טרפה לא תאכלו לכלב תשליכון אותו (שמות כב:ל)</p>
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Rashi and Ramban disagree on the meaning of אנשי קדש. Ramban claims that the subject of קדש is God and he reads the passuk like this: "Do not eat forbidden food so that you will be able to be the people of the 'Holy One'". Rashi, on the other hand, reads אנשי קדש as referring to the people. "You shall be a holy people by abstaining from forbidden foods."

On the surface, it appears that Rashi and Ramban are arguing whether קדש modifies the people or modifies God. And, of course, this is correct. Yet, they are also arguing about something much larger. According to Ramban, the source of the uniqueness of the Jewish people is our connection and relationship to God who is the source of all holiness. Rashi, on the other hand, argues that the holiness emanates from the people themselves. If they distance themselves from forbidden food, they are called "holy people".

We all aspire to holiness. In this passuk, the commentators provide a gameplan for achieving this goal. According to Ramban, we strive to get close to the source of קדושה, yet never ourselves achieve holiness. Rashi sees an opportunity to achieve this elusive קדושה ourselves. I believe that the Torah places before us the challenge of both Rashi and Ramban. We must strive to achieve our own sense of קדושה while, at the same time, recognizing that the ultimate source of that קדושה is unobtainable. The self-confidence that is required to achieve holiness must be balanced with the humility associated with realizing the awesomeness of God and His character. May we all achieve this delicate balance in our lives of Torah study and interaction with people.



Rabbi Adam Mintz is the founder and rabbi of Kehilat Rayim Ahuvim, a Modern Orthodox community on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. He is the Director of 929 English, a project that promotes the daily study of a chapter of the Tanakh through an updated webpage and social media. Rabbi Mintz is also an Adjunct Associate Professor of Jewish History at City College, New York. Rabbi Mintz is married to Sharon Liberman Mintz, the Curator of Jewish Art at The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary and the Senior Consultant for Judaica at Sothebys. They have three children; Noam (and Lily), Ariel and Shoshana.