

# Ki Tetzei: Kadesh and Kadosh

- Nisson Shulman.

One dot makes the difference, because... Appropriate for Yamim Noraim

Ki Keitzei: Kadosh and Kadesh  
(Also appropriate for Yamim Noraim)

1. In the Torah portion of Ki Tetzei we find the prohibition of any form of prostitution, male or female. The word for a male prostitute is "Kadesh". The feminine form, for a female prostitute is "Kedesha".
2. This word closely resembles the word "Kadosh", a holy person or object. The only difference between the way we write "Kadesh" and "Kadosh" is one dot. "Kadesh", with two dots under the Daled is the degenerate; "Kadosh", with one dot above the Daled, is the holy man.
3. This is not a coincidence. Hebrew usually has connected meanings for all words with the same root. So the Hebrew language teaches an important lesson through the similarity of these two seemingly opposite words.
4. Ramban explains: "It is my opinion that both words have the same root. For he who keeps away from lust is called a 'Kadosh', and he who succumbs to it is called a 'Kadesh'." Nahmanides view is that the very same practice can become pure or profane, holy or lustful. And the words "Kadosh" and "Kadesh" really mean "set apart", or "dedicated". One can be dedicated to immorality or wickedness, and be a "Kadesh". One can be dedicated to holy deeds and be a "Kadosh".
5. Thus, sex can become immoral, and yet, the very first Torah commandment is to "Be fruitful and multiply". So it is with any physical appetite. One can make Kiddush over wine, and on the other hand one can use wine to wallow in drunkenness and filth. Ramban stresses this in his first comment to the portion Kedoshim tihyu, ending with the words yachol lihiyot naval birshut haTorah!
6. A famous physician once explained that there is no such thing as a poison that can do no good. Harmless foods can become poisonous if eaten to excess. And virulent poisons have good humanitarian uses. Radiation can kill or cure. Iodine is a poison administered as medicine to thyroid patients. Even arsenic is used therapeutically. Many drugs which are addictive are used in hospitals and hospices to ease otherwise intractable pain.
7. And so it is with emotions as well. Anger is wicked. The Talmud declares that one who succumbs to anger is as if he worships idols. On the other hand, when we see injustice done, we must use our anger to help the oppressed. Jealousy is evil. But we are permitted and even encouraged to be jealous of the knowledge another has and the piety he or she shows, if we ourselves will thereby be inspired to increase our own knowledge and improve our own piety.

8. The Torah wants us to channel our thoughts, appetites, emotions, and use them in God's service. If we do, we become the masters of these appetites and emotions. If we do not, they master us and we are their slaves; slaves to passion, to lust, to any passing fancy. So the challenge is given to each of us, every moment of our lives: which will it be; "Kadesh" or "Kadosh"?