



“Wholiness Code”:
Torah Reflections on Parashat Kedoshim
Leviticus 16:1 – 20:27
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As rabbi in the hospital, I am often reminded that it is not necessarily I who bring gifts of the spirit to patients, their loved ones, or others seeking my counsel. It is often the reverse:

“Sickness is holy,” whispered the weak patient in the bed by the window, in the darkened room. I leaned in to hear better. She continued. “Sickness is sacred and spiritual. I lie here and imagine healing and wholeness. I have a name for it, rabbi. I lie here and pray for “wholiness”. “What is this “wholiness” to you?” I asked. She answered, “wholiness” is when I reach deeply into my resources and feel my spirit calmed and I trust in the sacred process”. She fell asleep holding my hand. I stood up and recited ancient Hebrew words of healing. When I left her room I carried her gift with me - “wholiness”, a new word that brings a new understanding of the blending of holiness and healing and wholeness.

The title of this week’s Torah portion is “Kedoshim”, a word for “holiness”. Its opening sentence is about the connection between the Jewish people, God, and holiness. It is central not only to Jewish thinking on holiness but is located in the Torah portion (Kedoshim) that is centrally located in the central book (Leviticus) of the Torah. Certainly then, it is central to the thinking about the equation of humanity to holiness and Godliness. It reads:

*Kedoshim tihyu. Ki kadosh ani Adonai elohechem.
You will be holy because I your God am holy¹.*

In Jewish tradition this line is part of the “Holiness Code” – the Torah’s guidelines to holiness.

“Holiness” has been explained by respected Jewish commentators through the ages who have defined and redefined “holiness” as “sacred” or “separate” or “Godlike” or other definitions that conjure something even greater than a moral, enlightened or elevated way of being,

I have come to read “holiness”, and in particular in this sentence, as an explanation of humankind’s umbilicus with that indefinable quality one ascribes to the God of Holiness and Wholeness. In this sense it defines the sacred territory of a person in sickness, pain, recovery, or in the plethora of other places where the human spirit or body craves healing. “It is “healing” that connects “holiness” to “wholeness” and transforms this connection to “wholiness”.

¹ Leviticus 19:2

This connection is affirmed by the ancient Jewish play on numbers called gematria. Gematria is infused with the wisdom of mystical Judaism that seeks and finds connection between all things. In working with gematria, each Hebrew letter is assigned a number and gematria becomes a numerical equation that ascribes meaning to and connection between words.

For instance, a gematria (or numerical value) for “holiness”², when added to a gematria for “healing”³ equals the gematria of “wholeness”.⁴ This equation begs the intellect and the spirit to look for meanings suggested by this mathematical, mystical addition, which I have called the “Wholiness Code”.

The “Wholiness Code” is a guideline to wholeness. It illuminates a facet of the sacred process of the holiness of healing and the healing qualities of holiness.

As rabbi in the hospital I am often asked to pray with or for a patient. This is the prayer from the ancient daily liturgy⁵ I recited at the bedside on that day.

*R'faeinu v'neirafei, hoshi-einu v'nivashei-ah
V'ha-aleih r'fu-ah sh'leimah
l'hol makoteinu, ul'hol tahalu-einu, ul'chol mahoveinu.
Baruh atah Adonai rofei ha'holim.*

*Heal us and let us be healed, Save us and let us be saved.
Grant full healing to our every illness, wound and pain.
Blessed are you Adonai who heals the sick.*

And I added: “And who blesses us with the gift of “wholiness”.

May the prayers and yearnings of all who cry out be heard. May we continue to be blessed with new understandings of holiness and healing. May we drink deeply of the delicious elixir of “wholiness”.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Pearl Barlev, the Jewish Chaplain on staff at UCLA Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA. It is brought to you by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties), an affiliate of the Institute on Aging.

² Mikudash, “sanctified” or “holy” (mem-koof-vav-dalet-shin) = 450.

³ L'hirafei, “to be healed” (lamed-hey-yud-reish-fey-alef) = 326.

⁴ Shleimut, “wholeness” (shin-lamed-mem-vav-taf) = 776.

⁵ From the weekday liturgy. See Mishkan T'filah p.86, CCAR, N.Y. 2007