

KEDOSHIM (19:1-20:27)

Exodus from Belarus

2005 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

“Be Kadosh – Holy; because I, your G-d, am Holy.” (Exodus, 19:1)

The Torah tells us to be *Kadosh – Holy*. How does one become *Kadosh*? There are many ways.

A person who lives his life scrupulously avoiding sin is called a *Kadosh*, a holy person. The Torah gives us many examples as to how to be *Kadosh*:

Revere your parents...observe the Sabbath...don't worship idols...When you harvest your field, leave some over for the poor. ... Don't steal, don't lie, and don't swear falsely.... Pay your workers on time. ... Don't curse the deaf or mislead the blind.... Don't pervert justice. ... Give someone the benefit of the doubt...don't gossip...love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. (Leviticus 16:3-18)

One can live as a *Kadosh*, and one can die as a *Kadosh*. One of the translations of the word *Kadosh* is “martyr.” When a person gives up his life for his faith, he is called a *Kadosh*, a holy martyr. The victims of the Spanish Inquisition who chose to be burnt at the stake rather than abandon Judaism are called *Kedoshim*. A Jew who is murdered simply because he is a Jew is called a *Kadosh*. Hence, we refer to the victims of the Holocaust as the Six Million *Kedoshim*.

Many people memorialized the Six Million *Kedoshim* last week on *Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Memorial Day. I say “many people” because there is a school of thought that prefers to commemorate the Holocaust on Tisha B'Av. Along with many Torah Sages, reportedly the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin was of that opinion. Additionally, it has been pointed out that right after Passover seems to be a strange time to commemorate the Holocaust, especially since we do not recite Memorial Prayers during the entire month of Nissan, due to its festive nature.

There is, in any event, a link between the Holocaust and Passover.

I’d like to share a story.

In 1904, an 18-year old boy from Postavy, a Russian/Polish/Lithuanian town in what is now Belarus, got on a boat and went to America. He married, settled in Connecticut, and went into the cattle and chicken farming business. By the time the Second World War began, his family was well-settled in its pursuit of the American Dream. His family never experienced the Holocaust.

That farmer raised a family of nine children. One of his sons had four children. I am one of those children.

That farmer's name was Rachmiel Tzepleyevitch (Zeplovitz at Ellis Island; Seplovitz in Connecticut). I, Yerachmiel Seplovitz

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