

The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lzhensk
Noam Elimelech
Parshas Kedoshim

Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel.	צָבָר אֶל כָּל צִקְנָת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
It seems one may interpret: behold, the absolutely righteous are called "Israel,"	נִרְאָה לְפָרֵשׁ דָּהֵנֶה הַצָּדִיקִים הַגָּמָורִים "נִקְרָאים" יִשְׂרָאֵל
and the righteous who are not complete are called "Children of Israel."	וְהַצָּדִיקִים שְׁאֵנֶם גָּמָורִים נִקְרָאים "בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל",
And the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded:	וְצֹהָה כְּשָׁם יְחִיבֶךָ
"Speak to all the Children of Israel," meaning,	דָּבָר אֶל כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" פִּירּוֹשׁ"
they are all equally capable for this exalted level—	—שְׁכָלָם שְׁוָיִם לְטוֹבָה לְמִזְרָגָה הַזֹּאת
"You shall be holy," which is a great level,	קָדְשִׁים תִּהְיוּ", שֶׁהִיא מִזְרָגָה גְּדוֹלָה"
"for I, Hashem, am holy."	'כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אָנִי ה'" כֹּו"
Meaning: for the essence of holiness is to constantly focus on My Godliness,	פִּירּוֹשׁ: כִּי עֲקָר קָדְשָׁה הוּא לְהַסְתִּכְלֵל ', פְּמִיד עַל אַלְקָוָתִי שֶׁאָנִי ה
and in this aspect they can all be holy.	וּבְבִנְהָה זוֹ יָכוֹלִים בָּלָם לְהִיוֹת קָדוֹשִׁים
And this is (the verse), "He lifted his eyes and saw—behold, a ram after, caught in the thicket by its horns."	וְזֹהוּ "וַיִּשְׁאַל עַיִּינוֹ וַיַּרְא וְהַנֵּה אֵל אֶחָר נְאָתוֹ בְּסֶבֶב בְּקָרְנֵי
A person must always look to the Exalted One, for He is our God, as mentioned above.	שָׁאַרְיךָ הָאָדָם לְהַסְתִּכְלֵל פְּמִיד רֹומְמוֹת אֶל שֶׁהָוָא אַלְקָנוּ כָּנְנֵל
At the same time, he must also reflect on his own lowness.	וְזֹאת גַּם כֵּן צָרִיךָ לְהַסְתִּכְלֵל בְּשִׁפְלוֹתָו
The dust of the Binding of Yitzchak is gathered as a merit to recall the Akeidah for the seed of Israel.	וְהַנֵּה עֲקִידַת יַצְחָק עַפְרוֹן אָבּוֹר לְזַכּוֹר עֲקִידַת יַצְחָק לְנָרָע יִשְׂרָאֵל
And Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, wished to establish another merit for Israel	וְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עַלְיוֹ הַשְׁלָוֹם רְצָחָה לְמַקְוֹן עוֹד לִיְשָׂרָאֵל דָּבָר אֶחָד
that would serve them as a merit like that of Yitzchak's ram.	שִׁיְהָא לָהֶם לְזַכּוֹת כְּמוֹ אַיּוֹ שֶׁל יַצְחָק
And this is "Avraham lifted his eyes and saw—behold, another ram."	וְזֹהוּ "וַיִּשְׁאַל אַבְרָהָם וַיַּרְא וְהַנֵּה אֵל אֶחָר
Meaning: in addition, he established for Israel something else, like the merit of Yitzchak's ram,	רְלִי: זֹאת וְעוֹד אַתָּרָת מַקְוֹן לִיְשָׂרָאֵל שִׁיְהָא כְּמוֹ זַכּוֹת הָאֵל שֶׁל יַצְחָק
which is, "caught in the thicket by its horns"—	דָּהֵנֶה "נְאָתוֹ בְּסֶבֶב בְּקָרְנֵי

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meaning, to grasp this trait: to look upon his own lowliness—	פִּירּוֹשׁ: שִׁיאָהּ בְּמַדָּה זוֹ לְהַקְתִּבֵּל בְּשִׁפְלוֹתּוֹ—
to see himself as lowly and despicable in his eyes, like a thorn and bramble—	שִׁיחָא שְׁפֵל וּנוּבּוֹתָה בְּעֵינֵינוּ כְּמוֹ קָזָן, ינְדָרֶר,
“by its horns”—meaning, also within this quality to reflect on the Exalted One and His greatness.	בְּקָרְנֵי" פִּירּוֹשׁ: גַם בְּמַדָּה זוֹ לְהַקְתִּבֵּל גַם כֵּן רֹאשָׁמוֹת אֵל וְגָדוֹלָתוֹ
“His horns” implies rulership and greatness. And it is understood.	קָרְנֵי לְשׁוֹן שְׂרָה וְגָדוֹלָה. וְק"ל

[NOTE: Summary

Reb Elimelech explains that there are two kinds of tzaddikim: those who are complete ("ישראל") and those still striving ("בני ישראל"). The Torah emphasizes that **every Jew**—no matter their level—**can attain holiness**, because holiness is fundamentally about **consciousness of G-d's presence** ("בַּי קָדוֹשׁ אָנָּה").

He draws a parallel from the Akeidah (Binding of Isaac):

When Avraham saw the **ram caught in the thicket**, it symbolized a dual lesson. The thicket represents the **lowliness** a person must see in themselves—like thorns. The ram's **horns** (קרני) symbolize **elevation and Divine greatness**. True holiness is achieved by **balancing these two views**: humility before oneself and awe before G-d.

This is how Avraham paved the way for his descendants to be holy: by teaching them to live in **constant awareness of their own nothingness and G-d's everythingness**.

Practical Takeaway

To become holy doesn't mean you must be perfect—it means you must **be aware**.

- Look at your **own smallness** honestly, with humility.
- Look at **G-d's greatness** constantly, with reverence.
- **Both together** generate true holiness.

No matter your spiritual level, if you carry both those awarenesses, you are already walking the path of the holy.

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Chassidic Story (Reb Elimelech of Lzhensk)

Source: *Tzaddikim Nistarim, Shivchei haTzaddik*, oral tradition from Lzhensk chassidim.

Once, a wealthy chassid came to **Reb Elimelech of Lzhensk** and asked for a blessing for **true humility**. The Rebbe gave no response. Later, at the tisch, the Rebbe suddenly said aloud:

“There are two kinds of anavah (humility): one is when a person looks at themselves and feels like dust—that’s a good start. But the higher humility is when a person knows their spiritual greatness and still feels like dust.”

He looked at the wealthy man and added:

“Avraham Avinu saw both: the thicket and the ram’s horns. That’s why G-d called him ‘My beloved.’”

That man left and donated a large sum anonymously to help poor brides—writing in his note:

“*For those who feel like thorns, to rise like rams.*”

END NOTE]

Or it may be said: “Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel.”	או יואמר דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל
And let us first explain a Mishnah in Avos: “Rabbi Chananya ben Chachinai says, one who stays awake at night...”	ונגידים לפירש משנה באבות: רבי חנניא בן חיינאי אומר הצעור בלילה כו
Behold, we have already written on this several times,	זהינה כבר כתבנו בזה פה פעים
that the tzaddik must serve the Creator, blessed is He and blessed is His Name, on two levels:	זהצדיק ארייך לעבד את הבודא ברוך הוא ובברוך שמו בשני מדרגות:
to always look and contemplate the Exaltedness of G-d and His greatness, and to always contemplate and look upon his own lowliness.	לראות תמיד לחשב רוממות אל וגודלו וללחשב ולראות תמיד בשפלותו.
And this is the meaning of the Mishnah: “Akavya ben Mahalalel says: look at three things...”	וזה פירוש המשנה: “עקביא בן מהלאל אומר, אומר הסתפל בשילשה דברים כו
“Know from where you come...” “from a putrid drop...”	דע מאיין כו, מאיין באת מטפה סרויה
At first glance, the Tanna should have shortened the statement and simply said:	ולכלאורה היה לו לסתן לכאדר ולזומר
“Look: know from where you come, from a putrid drop,” etc.— why did he need to repeat himself?	הסתפל דעת מאיין באת מטפה סרויה כו ולמה לו לכפל את דבריו?

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But the truth is, the Tanna taught us the ways of Hashem as we mentioned:	אבל האמת שהתנאה הורה לנו את זרכיו ה' ל, כנ"ל
that we must always look at both the Exaltedness of G-d and our own lowliness.	שאנו חביבים להסמכה פסיד את רוממות אל ושפלוותנו.
And he hinted first by saying, "Know from where you come"—	— "ורמז תחלה באמרו "דע מאיין באה
meaning, see and reflect and consider your origin: that you were hewn from there—	פירוש: ראה והסתכל והשב מהחכמתו שונחכבה מכם,
from a lofty place beneath the Throne of Glory.	מאוקום גבוה מתחת כסא הקב"ד,
"And to where are you going"—meaning,	ולאן אתה הולך" — פירוש
think about how your soul must return to the place it came from, to its original quarry,	ומחשב שאירך שטחזר נשמחת למקומם שגלאותה, למחרצתה הראשו
without any blemish.	בלוי שום פגם,
You must refine and purify and cleanse your soul from all impurity.	ואיך אתה לזכך ולצחצח וללבון את נשמחתה מכל סיג
"And before whom you are destined to give judgment"—	ולפניהם אתה עתיד לעמוד דין
these three correspond to the Exaltedness of G-d,	ושהלשה האלהם רוממות האל,
and the Tanna warned us in his pure and refined language.	והזהיר סתמא בלשונו הצעק והטהור.
And afterward, the Tanna explained to us that we must also consider our lowliness—	ואחר כה פירש לנו הקב"ה שונחשב גם בשפלותנו —
and those are: "From where you come..." and "Before whom..."	"ויהם מאיין באת כו" ו"לפניהם מי כו
and how can you raise your face to stand before a great and awesome King,	ואיך תשא פניך לעמד לפניהם מלך גדול ונורא,
when you reflect on your own lowliness—	בהתבכלה בשפלותך כזה
that you are vanity and nothingness and a passing shadow?	שאטה הבל ויריק וצל עזבר?
Therefore let it always be before your eyes, and always be in a state of repentance	לכון ייה פסיד נגיד עיניך, ותהייה תמיד בתקשיבותך
for your sins and transgressions,	על עונותיך ופשעיך,
for one so lowly has angered His great and awesome Name.	שהשפל כזה הטעיס שמו הגדל והנורא,
And always see the Exaltedness of G-d and His Oneness,	ותראה פסיד את רוממות האל ואחדותו
to unify His great Name truly.	ליחד שמו הגדל באמת.

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And always worry for the troubles of Israel and pray for them—	ופ្សאָג פַּמִּיד עַל צְרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלַהֲתִפְלֵל עַלּוּקָם —
for their welfare and abundance, that Hashem, blessed is He, should bestow upon them all good,	עַל טוֹבָתָם וְהַשְׁפָעָתָם, שִׁיחָפֵיעַ לָקָם הַשָּׁם יִתְבּרַךְ כֹּל טוֹב
and to annul from them all harsh decrees.	וְלִבְטַל מְעַלְקָם כָּל הַגְּזִירָות.
And this is the meaning of “One who stays awake at night”—	וְזֹהוּ “הַגְּזִירָה בְּלִילָה”, פִּירּוּשׁ: הַצָּדִיק שֶׁהָיָה נָעוֹר וְלֹא יָנוּם וְלֹא יִשְׁנֶן
meaning: the tzaddik who stays awake, and does not slumber nor sleep,	פִּירּוּשׁ: הַצָּדִיק שֶׁהָיָה נָעוֹר וְלֹא יָנוּם וְלֹא יִשְׁנֶן
in this bitter exile that is called “night,”	”, בְּגָלוֹת הַמֶּר הַזֶּה שָׁגָרָא “לִילָה
and he constantly prays for the joy of Israel and their greatness.	וּמְתַפֵּל פַּמִּיד עַל שְׁמַחוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגָדוֹלָתָם.
“And one who walks on the path alone”—	— “וְהַמְּהַלֵּךְ בְּדַרְךָ יִחְיֵי”
meaning: he walks the path of truth in solitude, in modesty,	פִּירּוּשׁ: שֶׁהַלֵּךְ בְּדַרְךָ קָאָמָת בְּבִדּוּיות, בְּהַאֲנָעַלְקָת
without showing his piety to others,	שֶׁלֹּא לְהַרְאֹת חֲסִידוֹתָו לְאֶחָרִים
and walks in His Oneness to unify His great Name.	וְהַוֹּלֵךְ בְּאֲחַדָּתוֹ לִיחִיד שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל
“And turns his heart to waste”—	— “וּמְפַנֵּה לְבָוּ לְבַטְלָה”
meaning: he diverts his heart from all his affairs and matters that concern him,	פִּירּוּשׁ: שְׁפֹנָה לְבָוּ מִכֶּל עַנְנָיו וְעַסְקָיו, הַנּוֹגָעִים לוּ
and he thinks and sees only to annul all decrees from upon Israel.	וְאִינּוּ חֹשֵׁב וּרֹאָה אֶלָּא לְבַטְלָה כָּל הַגְּזִירָות מִיּוֹשָׁבָל.
And when you see such a tzaddik—know that he sees his own lowliness,	וְכַשְׁתַּרְאָה צְדִיק כֹּה — חֹוו יְוָדָע שָׁהָוָה רֹאָה שְׁפָלוֹתָו,
and he sighs and worries constantly over his sins,	וְנָאָנָה וְדוֹאָג פַּמִּיד עַל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו,
and always sees himself as owing—	וְרֹאָה פַּמִּיד חֹב לְעַצְמוֹ,
feeling that he has fallen short in his service of the Blessed One,	שְׁאָהָסֶר בְּעַבּוֹתָו יִתְבּרַךְ שְׁמוֹ,
and it seems to him as though he has not served the Creator even one moment.	וְדוֹמָה לוּ קָאַלְוָה עַדְנוּ לֹא עָבֵד הַבָּרוֹא יִתְבּרַךְ אָפְרָגָע אָחֵד.
And this is “behold, this one”—meaning, this tzaddik—	— זֹהוּ “בָּרִי זֶה” — פִּירּוּשׁ: צְדִיק זֶה
“is guilty regarding his soul”—meaning, he is always holding his soul accountable, as above.	מַתְחִיב בְּגַנְפָשׁוֹ” — פִּירּוּשׁ: הָוָא מַתְחִיב אֲתָה גַּנְפָשׁוֹ פַּמִּיד כְּנָהָל
And this is, “and you shall speak of them,” which we expound in the Gemara: “and not of idle matters.”	וְזֹהוּ “וְדִבְרָתָ בָּם”, וְדִרְשׁוּ בְּגַמְרָא: “וְלֹא בְּקָרְבִּים בְּטַלִים”,

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Meaning: when you engage in Torah for its own sake, you will not need to speak to annul judgments— for they will be annulled on their own.	פירוש: כשתתעסכו בתורה לשמה, אז לא תוריה אריך לזרב לביטול דיןים — כי מפלא הם ביטלים.
And this is “Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel: You shall be holy...”	וזהו “דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל קדושים...”
Meaning: this is a matter that is equal for every soul— to sanctify oneself with the sanctity of the Blessed Creator.	פירוש: זהו דבר השהה לכל נפש להתקדש בקדשו של הבורא יתברך שמו
“For I am holy,” etc.—and you are My portion from above, and it is fitting for the entire congregation of Israel to be holy.	כי קדוש אני כו, ואquam חלקו ממעל וראו והוא לכל עדת בני ישראל קדושים וקיים.
And the verse says: “A man shall fear his mother and his father...”	”, ואמר הכתוב: איש אמו ואביו תיראו
Meaning: each man shall fear when he considers his origin— where he came from: his father and mother, as the Tanna said— this is to see one’s own lowliness.	ר”ל: כל איש יראה בזיה, בהסתכלו מאיין הוא מקום צאתו מאביו ואמו, כמו אמר הכתוב: ”, מאין כו, מטפה כו זהו ראותו בשפלותך.
And this is what King David, peace be upon him, said: “And in sin my mother conceived me.”	וזהו שאמר קודם הפלך עליו השלום ”, ובחתא יקח מתני אמי”
“And My Sabbaths you shall guard”—this refers to the Exaltedness of G-d, which is the novelty of creation, as it is written:	ואת שבתותי משמרו — והינו רמות אל, שזהו חדש העולם, כמו שבתותך:
“And He rested on the seventh day.”	”, וינה ביום השביעי”
And through two Shabbasos—when you fulfill the lower Shabbos, you rectify the upper Shabbos.	ושתי שבתות: על ידי שתקיימו שבת תחתון — תמקנו שבת עליון,
And that is the doubled expression “My Sabbaths”—meaning the lower and upper Shabbos.	וזה מלה כפולה “שבחותי”, הינו: שבת תחתון ועליון.
And our duty is to unify the One to the One.	ונעלנו ליחד אחד אל אחד.

[NOTE: Summary

Reb Elimelech of Lzhensk presents a profound meditation on holiness and the true inner life of a tzaddik.

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He begins by explaining the Mishnah, “הנעור בלילה... והמהלך בדרך יחידי... ומפנה לבו לבטלה,” not as a warning against idleness, but as a praise of the *true tzaddik*, who:

- **“Awakens at night”** — never spiritually sleeps in the darkness of exile, but instead remains spiritually vigilant, praying constantly for the Jewish people’s joy and redemption.
- **“Walks alone on the path”** — he lives with deep integrity, in solitude and modesty, hiding his piety from others and walking only with G-d.
- **“Turns his heart to nothingness”** — he removes personal concerns from his heart and fills it only with compassion for the Jewish people, praying to annul harsh decrees.

Such a tzaddik constantly sees his own **lowness**, feels **deep remorse** for his perceived spiritual shortcomings, and considers himself as though he has **never yet truly served G-d**—this is the meaning of “*מתהיב בנפשו*,” he is always holding his soul accountable.

Reb Elimelech concludes by returning to the verse “**דְּבָר אֱלֹהִים כָל עַדְתַּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל קָדוֹשִׁים תְּהִיוּ**”—**You shall be holy**, teaching that holiness is **accessible to all**. Through remembering one’s **low origin** (“*וְאַתָּ שְׁבֹתוֹתִי תִּשְׁמַרְוֹ*”), one sanctifies both lower and upper realms. Holiness, then, is not found in spiritual heights alone but in the fusion of **humility** and **Divine awe**—unifying “One to One.”

Practical Takeaway

To live a life of holiness like Reb Elimelech describes:

- Wake up to **spiritual darkness**—be vigilant in exile; never be complacent.
- Walk your spiritual path in **modesty**, not seeking attention.
- Empty your heart of selfish concerns and fill it with **compassion for others**.
- Remember both:
 - Your **lowly physical beginnings** (from a drop),
 - And your **Divine origin and destiny** (a soul from beneath the Throne).
- Practice **teshuvah** daily—not out of fear, but from a deep yearning to refine your soul.
- Unify your actions in this world (“lower Shabbos”) with their higher source (“upper Shabbos”) by living with purpose, presence, and love of G-d.

Chassidic Story (Reb Elimelech of Lzhensk)

Source: *Shivchei haTzaddik*, oral tradition from Lzhensk chassidim and “Noam Elimelech” commentary practices

The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lzhensk

Noam Elimelech

Parshas Kedoshim

One night, a student of Reb Elimelech noticed that the Rebbe had not returned to his bed after midnight. Quietly, he crept toward the study and peeked in. There sat Reb Elimelech, wrapped in his tallis, eyes burning with tears.

He was whispering, again and again:

“רְבָנוֹ שֶׁל עַזְלָם, אָפָה יְדַע שְׁעַדְךָ לֹא הִתְחַלְתִּי לְעַבְדֶךָ.”

“Master of the world, You know I have not yet even *begun* to serve You...”

The student trembled. He later asked the Rebbe, “Is this what a tzaddik feels?”

Reb Elimelech replied:

“The moment you feel you have *already* served Him, you stop growing. The moment you know you have *not yet begun*, your service becomes real.”

And then he added:

“And in that emptiness, you can fill your heart with the pain of another Jew, and pray for him as if for yourself.” **END NOTE]**