

The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

Noam Elimelech
Parshas Kedoshim

Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel.	דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עֵדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
It seems one may interpret: behold, the absolutely righteous are called "Israel,"	נִרְאָה לְפָרֵשׁ דִּהְיָה הַצְדִּיקִים הַגָּמוּרִים "יִשְׂרָאֵל"
and the righteous who are not complete are called "Children of Israel."	וְהַצְדִּיקִים שְׂאִינָם גָּמוּרִים נִקְרָאִים "בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל",
And the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded:	וַצִּוָּה ה' שֶׁיִּתְבָּרַךְ
"Speak to all the Children of Israel," meaning,	דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" פִּירוּשׁ
they are all equally capable for this exalted level—	— שֶׁכָּל־אֶחָד מֵהֶם יָכוֹל לָמַדְרָגָה הַזֹּאת
"You shall be holy," which is a great level,	קִדְּוָה תִּהְיֶה, "שֶׁהִיא מִדְרָגָה גְדוֹלָה"
"for I, Hashem, am holy."	"כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה'" כו'
Meaning: for the essence of holiness is to constantly focus on My Godliness,	פִּירוּשׁ: כִּי עֹקֶר הַקִּדְּוָה הוּא לְהִסְתַּכֵּל עַל אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׂאִינָהּ
and in this aspect they can all be holy.	וּבִבְחִינָה זוֹ יְכוּלִים כָּל־אֶחָד לִהְיוֹת קָדוֹשִׁים
And this is (the verse), "He lifted his eyes and saw—behold, a ram after, caught in the thicket by its horns."	וַיִּזְהוּ "וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה אֵיל אַחֵר נֶאֱחָז בַּסִּבְכָּה בְּקַרְנָיו"
A person must always look to the Exalted One, for He is our God, as mentioned above.	שֶׁצָּרִיךְ הָאָדָם לְהִסְתַּכֵּל תָּמִיד רוּמָמוֹת אֵל שֶׁהוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ כַּנִּזְכָּר
At the same time, he must also reflect on his own lowliness.	וְזֹאת גַּם כֵּן צָרִיךְ לְהִסְתַּכֵּל בְּשִׁפְלוּתוֹ
The dust of the Binding of Yitzchak is gathered as a merit to recall the Akeidah for the seed of Israel.	וְהִנֵּה עֲקִידַת יִצְחָק עֲפָרוֹ צָבֹר לְזִכּוֹר עֲקִידַת יִצְחָק לְזֵרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל
And Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, wished to establish another merit for Israel	וְאַבְרָהָם אַבִּינוּ עָלָיו הַשְׁלוֹם רָצָה לְתַקֵּן עוֹד לְיִשְׂרָאֵל דָּבָר אֶחָד
that would serve them as a merit like that of Yitzchak's ram.	שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לָהֶם לְזִכּוֹת כְּמוֹ אֵילוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק
And this is "Avraham lifted his eyes and saw—behold, another ram."	"וַיִּזְהוּ" וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה אֵיל אַחֵר
Meaning: in addition, he established for Israel something else, like the merit of Yitzchak's ram,	ר"ל: זֹאת וְעוֹד אַחֲרֵת תִּקֵּן לְיִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיִּהְיֶה כְּמוֹ זִכּוֹת הָאֵיל שֶׁל יִצְחָק
which is, "caught in the thicket by its horns"—	"וְהִנֵּה נֶאֱחָז בַּסִּבְכָּה בְּקַרְנָיו"

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meaning, to grasp this trait: to look upon his own lowliness—	פִּירוּשׁ: שְׂאֵחֻז בְּמִדָּה זוֹ לְהִסְתַּכֵּל —בְּשִׁפְלוּתוֹ
to see himself as lowly and despicable in his eyes, like a thorn and bramble—	שִׁיחָא שְׂכַל וְנִבְוָה בְּעֵינָיו כְּמוֹ קוֹץ וְדִרְדִּיר
“by its horns”—meaning, also within this quality to reflect on the Exalted One and His greatness.	בְּקִרְנָיו" פִּירוּשׁ: גַּם בְּמִדָּה זוֹ לְהִסְתַּכֵּל" גַּם בֶּן רוּמָמוֹת אֶל וּגְדוּלָתוֹ
“His horns” implies rulership and greatness. And it is understood.	קִרְנָיו לְשׁוֹן שְׂרָרָה וּגְדוּלָה. 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** ("כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה'").

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 (קרניים)** 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 Lizhensk)

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

Once, a wealthy chassid came to **Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk** 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...”	ונקדים לפרש משנה באבות: רבי חנניה בן 'חכינאי אומר הנעור בלילה כו
Behold, we have already written on this several times,	דהנה כבר כתבנו בזה כמה פעמים
that the tzaddik must serve the Creator, blessed is He and blessed is His Name, on two levels:	דהצדיק צריך לעבוד את הבורא ברוך הוא וברוך שמו בשני מדרגות:
to always look and contemplate the Exaltedness of G-d and His greatness,	לראות תמיד לחשב רוממות אל וגדולתו,
and to always contemplate and look upon his own lowliness.	ולחשב ולראות תמיד בשפלותו.
And this is the meaning of the Mishnah: “Akavya ben Mahalalel says: look at three things...”	וזהו פירוש המשנה: "עקבניא בן מהללאל", "אומר הסתפל בשלשה דברים כו
“Know from where you come...” “from a putrid drop...”	דע מאין כו, מאין באת מטפה סרוחה", "כו
At first glance, the Tanna should have shortened the statement and simply said:	ולכאורה היה לו לתנא לקצר ולומר:
“Look: know from where you come, from a putrid drop,” etc.—	"הסתפל דע מאין באת מטפה סרוחה כו",
why did he need to repeat himself?	ולמה לו לכפל את דבריו?

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But the truth is, the Tanna taught us the ways of Hashem as we mentioned:	אָבֵל הָאָמֶת שֶׁהִתְנָא הוֹרָה לָנוּ אֶת דְּרָכֵי ה' כְּנִ"ל,
that we must always look at both the Exaltedness of G-d and our own lowliness.	נִשְׁאָנוּ חֲבִיבִים לְהִסְתַּכֵּל תָּמִיד אֶת רוּמְמוֹת אֵל וְשִׁפְלוּתֵנוּ.
And he hinted first by saying, “Know from where you come”—	— “וְרָמַז תַּחֲלָה בְּאָמְרוֹ "דַּע מֵאֵין בָּאתָ
meaning, see and reflect and consider your origin: that you were hewn from there—	פִּירוּשׁ: רָאָה וְהִסְתַּכֵּל וְחָשַׁב מִחֻצְבַּתָּהּ שִׁנְחֻצְבַּת מִשָּׁם,
from a lofty place beneath the Throne of Glory.	מִמָּקוֹם גְּבוּהָ מִתַּחַת כִּסֵּא הַכְּבוֹד,
“And to where are you going”—meaning,	וּלְאֵן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ" — פִּירוּשׁ:
think about how your soul must return to the place it came from, to its original quarry,	וְתִחְשַׁב שֶׁצָּרִיךְ שֶׁתִּחְזֹר נִשְׁמָתָהּ לְמָקוֹם שִׁנְחֻלְקָתָהּ, לְמִחֻצְבַּת הָרֵאשׁוֹן,
without any blemish.	בְּלִי שׁוּם פֶּגַם,
You must refine and purify and cleanse your soul from all impurity.	וְצָרִיךְ אַתָּה לְזַכֵּךְ וּלְצַחֲצַח וּלְלַבֵּן אֶת נִשְׁמָתָהּ מִכָּל סִיג.
“And before whom you are destined to give judgment”—	"וּלְפָנֵי מִי אַתָּה עֹתִיד לִתֵּן דִּין",
these three correspond to the Exaltedness of G-d,	וְהַשְׁלִישָׁה הָאֵלֶּה הֵם רוּמְמוֹת הָאֵל,
and the Tanna warned us in his pure and refined language.	וְהִזְהִיר הִתְנָא בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ הַנּוֹרָא וְהַשְׁהוּר.
And afterward, the Tanna explained to us that we must also consider our lowliness—	וְאַחֵר כִּף פִּירֵשׁ לָנוּ הִתְנָא שִׁנְחֻשְׁב גַּם — בְּשִׁפְלוּתֵנוּ
and those are: “From where you come...” and “Before whom...”	", "וְהֵם "מֵאֵין בָּאתָ כו'" ו"לְפָנֵי מִי כו"
and how can you raise your face to stand before a great and awesome King,	וְאִיךָ תִּשָּׂא פָנֶיךָ לַעֲמֹד לְפָנֵי מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל וְנוֹרָא,
when you reflect on your own lowliness—	בְּהִסְתַּכֵּל בְּשִׁפְלוּתְךָ כֵּן?
that you are vanity and nothingness and a passing shadow?	שֶׁאַתָּה הֶבֶל וְרִיק וְצֵל עוֹבֵר?
Therefore let it always be before your eyes, and always be in a state of repentance	לֵכֵן יִהְיֶה תָּמִיד נֶגֶד עֵינֶיךָ, וְתִהְיֶה תָּמִיד בְּתַשׁוּבָה
for your sins and transgressions,	עַל עֲוֹנוֹתֶיךָ וּפְשָׁעֶיךָ,
for one so lowly has angered His great and awesome Name.	שֶׁהִשְׁפֵּל כֵּן הַכְּעִיס שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא
And always see the Exaltedness of G-d and His Oneness,	וְתִרְאֶה תָּמִיד אֶת רוּמְמוֹת הָאֵל וְאַחֲדוּתוֹ
to unify His great Name truly.	לְיַחַד שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל בְּאֻמָּת.

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And always worry for the troubles of Israel and pray for them—	וְתָדָאג תָּמִיד עַל צָרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִהְתַּפְּלֵל — עֲלֵיהֶם
for their welfare and abundance, that Hashem, blessed is He, should bestow upon them all good,	עַל טוֹבָתָם וְהַשְׁפָּעָתָם, שִׁשְׁפִּיעַ לָהֶם ה' שֶׁם יְתַבְּרָה כָּל טוֹב
and to annul from them all harsh decrees.	וּלְבַטֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם כָּל הַגְּזָרוֹת.
And this is the meaning of “One who stays awake at night”—	"וְזֶהוּ" הַנֶּעוֹר בַּלַּיְלָה,
meaning: the tzaddik who stays awake, and does not slumber nor sleep,	פִּירוּשׁ: הַצַּדִּיק שֶׁהוּא גֵּעוֹר וְלֹא יָנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן
in this bitter exile that is called “night,”	"בְּגָלוֹת הַמֶּר הַזֶּה שֶׁנִּקְרָא "לַיְלָה",
and he constantly prays for the joy of Israel and their greatness.	וּמִתְפַּלֵּל תָּמִיד עַל שִׂמְחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגִדּוּלָתָם.
“And one who walks on the path alone”—	— "וְהַמְהַלֵּךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ יְחִידִי"
meaning: he walks the path of truth in solitude, in modesty,	פִּירוּשׁ: שֶׁהוֹלֵךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת בְּבִדּוּדוֹת, בְּהִצְנֹעַ לִכְתּ
without showing his piety to others,	שֶׁלֹא לְהִרְאוֹת חֲסִידוּתוֹ לְאַחֵרִים
and walks in His Oneness to unify His great Name.	וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּאַחֲדוּתוֹ לִיחַד שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל.
“And turns his heart to waste”—	— "וּמַפְנֶה לְבוֹ לְבַטָּלָה"
meaning: he diverts his heart from all his affairs and matters that concern him,	פִּירוּשׁ: שֶׁפּוֹנֶה לְבוֹ מִכָּל עֲנִינָיו וְעִסְקָיו הַנוֹגְעִים לוֹ
and he thinks and sees only to annul all decrees from upon Israel.	וְאֵינוֹ חוֹשֵׁב וְרוֹאֶה אֶלָּא לְבַטֵּל כָּל הַגְּזָרוֹת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל.
And when you see such a tzaddik—know that he sees his own lowliness,	וּכְשֶׁתִּרְאֶה צַדִּיק כָּזֶה — הֵי יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁהוּא רוֹאֶה שְׁפָלוּתוֹ
and he sighs and worries constantly over his sins,	וְנִנְאָנֵחַ וְדוֹאג תָּמִיד עַל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו
and always sees himself as owing—	וְרוֹאֶה תָּמִיד חוֹב לַעֲצֻמוֹ
feeling that he has fallen short in his service of the Blessed One,	שֶׁמַּחֲסֵר בְּעִבּוּדָתוֹ יְתַבְּרָה שְׁמוֹ
and it seems to him as though he has not served the Creator even one moment.	וְדוֹמָה לוֹ כְּאִלוֹ עָדִין לֹא עָבַד הַבּוֹרָא יְתַבְּרָה אַף רִגַע אֶחָד.
And this is “behold, this one”—meaning, this tzaddik—	— וְזֶהוּ "הֵרִי זֶה" — פִּירוּשׁ: צַדִּיק זֶה
“is guilty regarding his soul”—meaning, he is always holding his soul accountable, as above.	מִתְחַיֵּב בְּנַפְשׁוֹ — פִּירוּשׁ: הוּא מְחַיֵּב אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ תָּמִיד בְּ"ל
And this is, “and you shall speak of them,” which we expound in the Gemara: “and not of idle matters.”	וְזֶהוּ "וְדַבַּרְתֶּם בָּם", וְדָרְשׁוּ בַּגְמָרָא: "וְלֹא בְּדַבָּרִים בְּטָלִים",

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Meaning: when you engage in Torah for its own sake, you will not need to speak to annul judgments—	פירוש: כַּשְׁתַּתְּעִסקוּ בַּתּוֹרָה לְשֵׁמָּה, אִזּוֹ לֹא — תִּהְיֶה צְרִיךְ לְדַבֵּר לְבַטֵּל דִּינִים
for they will be annulled on their own.	כִּי מִמִּילָא הֵם בְּטָלִים.
And this is “Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel: You shall be holy...”	וְזֶהוּ "דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עֵדֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל קְדוֹשִׁים..."
Meaning: this is a matter that is equal for every soul—	— פִּירוּשׁ: זֶהוּ דְּבַר הַשְׁוָה לְכָל נַפֵּשׁ
to sanctify oneself with the sanctity of the Blessed Creator.	,לְהִתְקַדֵּשׁ בְּקִדְשׁוֹ שֶׁל הַבּוֹרָא יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמוֹ
“For I am holy,” etc.—and you are My portion from above,	,כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי "כו', וְאַתֶּם חֲלָקִי מִמַּעַל"
and it is fitting for the entire congregation of Israel to be holy.	וְרְאוּי הוּא לְכָל עֵדֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁקְדוּשִׁים יִהְיוּ.
And the verse says: “A man shall fear his mother and his father...”	, "וְאָמַר הַכָּתוּב: "אִישׁ אִמּוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ"
Meaning: each man shall fear when he considers his origin—	ר"ל: כָּל אִישׁ יִרְאֶה בָּזֶה, בְּהִסְתַּכְּלוֹ מֵאֵין הוּא,
where he came from: his father and mother, as the Tanna said—	מְקוֹם צֵאתוֹ מֵאָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ, כְּמֵאֲמַר הַתַּנָּא: "מֵאֵין כו', מִטְּפָה כו'
this is to see one's own lowliness.	זֶהוּ רְאֵיתוֹ בְּשִׁפְלוּתוֹ.
And this is what King David, peace be upon him, said:	וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם:
“And in sin my mother conceived me.”	, "וּבְחַטָּא יִחַמְתַּנִּי אִמִּי"
“And My Sabbaths you shall guard”—this refers to the Exaltedness of G-d,	וְאֵת שַׁבָּתוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ" — וְהִגְּנוּ רוּחַמּוֹת" אֵל,
which is the novelty of creation, as it is written:	שֶׁזֶהוּ חֲדוּשׁ הָעוֹלָם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב:
“And He rested on the seventh day.”	, "וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי"
And through two Shabbasos—when you fulfill the lower Shabbos,	וּשְׁתֵּי שַׁבָּתוֹת: עַל יְדֵי שֶׁתִּקְנִימוּ שַׁבָּת — תַּחְתּוֹן
you rectify the upper Shabbos.	,תַּתְּקִנוּ שַׁבָּת עֲלִיוֹן
And that is the doubled expression “My Sabbaths”—meaning the lower and upper Shabbos.	וְזֶהוּ מִלֵּה כְּפֻלָּה "שַׁבָּתוֹתַי", הִגְּנוּ: שַׁבָּת תַּחְתּוֹן וְעֲלִיוֹן.
And our duty is to unify the One to the One.	וְעֲלֵינוּ לִיחד אֶחָד אֶל אֶחָד.

[NOTE: Summary

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

The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

Noam Elimelech
Parshas Kedoshim

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 **lowliness**, 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 “מתחייב בנפשו,” he is always holding his soul accountable.

Reb Elimelech concludes by returning to the verse “דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל קדושים תהיו”—**You shall be holy**, teaching that holiness is **accessible to all**. Through remembering one’s **low origin** (“איש אמו ואביו תיראו”) and contemplating **Divine greatness** (“ואת שבתותי תשמרו”), 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 Lizhensk)

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

The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

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:

“רבונו של עולם, אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁעַדִּין לֹא הִתְחַלְתִּי לַעֲבֹדָךְ.”

“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]**