

Dear Chavraya,

While driving one day this week I was listening to NPR's "On Point." I realized quickly that the subject didn't interest me. It concerned the newest generation of the Apple iPhone. As one who uses a cell phone almost exclusively for its most basic purpose -- to talk with people, I was not drawn to hear about the new phone's myriad applications or its sleek metallic casing. I listened for a few minutes to some of Tom Ashbrook's interview with an engineer for one of Apple's competitors, and then even to a few of the first calls from listeners. I had been about to change the station from the beginning, but something seemed to be holding me. I started to realize that the technical details about the phone were really the sub-text. The real story, it turns out, is that a prototype of the new phone was left in a bar by an Apple engineer who was out celebrating his birthday and seemed to have had too much to drink. While it seems rather bizarre, the engineer for the Apple competitor happened to find it. Here is where the deeper story begins, holding my attention as moral drama and social commentary.

Realizing what he had found, the competing engineer took the phone with him and contacted company executives. As though gathering for emergency surgery, a team was soon analyzing the lost phone. While I don't understand all of the details and intrigue in how the story unfolded, or when the poor engineer who had lost the phone became aware of what had happened, legal proceedings were soon underway to rescue the phone. As I continued to listen to the radio discussion of the "iPhone incident," it seemed that this, the real story, quickly receded, with technical details of the new phone becoming the main story. With a growing sense of disbelief, I kept waiting for something to be said about what would seem to be the obvious ethical dimension of the story. In the time that I listened, it was never asked whether the finder of the phone was right to take it. Nor were listeners asked, what would you have done?

In the context of this week's Torah portion, a double portion, *Acharei Mot-K'doshim*, this is the question that we need to ask. *Parashat K'doshim* begins with God's challenge -- *K'doshim ti'hiyu/you shall be holy, for I, God, your God, am holy*. A lengthy enumeration of *mitzvot* follows, almost all of which bear on human relationships and the wellbeing of society. Earlier in the Torah, at the beginning of *Sefer Vayikra*, this third book of the Torah in which we are currently reading, the answer to the question not asked on the radio program is made very clear. It is not a matter for deliberation. If a lost object is found, the finder must return it. Beyond a matter of law, *Parashat K'doshim* offers a framework in which to understand the higher purpose of moral behavior. Only in the realm of day-to-day human affairs do we have the opportunity to become holy, as God is holy, and thereby to create a holy society. Holiness is a reflection of harmony and caring among people. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch writes from mid-nineteenth century Germany, "*K'dusha/holiness*" results when a morally free human being has complete dominion over all his or her energies and inclinations and over the enticements and tendencies associated with these, and places them into the service of God's will.

In focusing on the details of intrigue and on the myriad applications of the new iPhone, an opportunity was lost. Among all of those "apps," there is none for

holiness, and no button to press for moral behavior. That comes only through our own striving. However fierce the competition, however seductive the prize of easy acquisition, the answer to God's challenge, *K'doshim ti'hiyu*, begins for each of us with the question not asked on the radio, "what would you have done?"

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor