



Parshas Acharei Mos

For the week ending 26 Nissan 5757
3 May 1997

Overview

Hashem instructs the Kohanim to exercise extreme care when they enter the Mishkan. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol is to approach the holiest part of the Mishkan after special preparations and in special clothing. He brings offerings that are unique for Yom Kippur including the two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is "for Hashem," and is offered in the Temple, while the other is "for Azazel" in the desert. The Torah states the individual's obligations on Yom Kippur: *On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing, and marital relations.*

Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a women's monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited. The people are instructed not to defile themselves with these prohibitions so that they will merit living in the Land of Israel.

Insights

A DAMNING SILENCE

"After the death of the two sons of Aaron..." (16:1).

Someone who hears evil and does not protest or at least show displeasure is, in fact, condoning that which was said. It's as though he spoke the evil himself and therefore deserves the same judgment.

When the Bnei Yisrael were traveling in the desert, Moshe and Aaron would lead them, followed by Nadav and Avihu and in turn the rest of the nation.

Nadav once said to Avihu: "When will these elderly men pass away so we can have our turn at leadership?" Hashem then said, "We will see who will bury whom," and He allowed them to stumble until they were eventually punished with a Divinely inflicted death.

One can understand why Nadav was punished. But what did Avihu do? He merely kept silent.

Avihu was punished because he didn't react with the disgust that Nadav's remarks deserved. And thus he was as guilty as if he had said them himself.

(Nachal Kadomim)

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

"And he (Aaron) will place the incense on the fire in front of Hashem." (16:13)

In the first part of the service of Yom Kippur in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Kohen Gadol would burn incense in the Holy-of-Holies.

The *Tzedukim* (Sadducees), who denied the authority of the Oral Torah, claimed that the incense should first be placed on the fire in a fire-pan outside the Holy-of-Holies, and only then the Kohen Gadol should carry it inside. The Talmud (Yoma 53) cites the above verse as a proof to the contrary: that the incense should only be placed on the fire "in front of Hashem". In every generation, the Jewish People has its 'Tzedukim' - those who wish to introduce novelty into Judaism from what they have seen 'outside'. To ape the secular world and introduce 'improvements' 'adjustments' and 'modernizations' into the sanctity of Yisrael. The Torah sages of every generation fight a constant and bitter battle against these 'improvements'. Which is **not** to say that the Torah is stuck in a bygone age. On the contrary, the Torah speaks to each generation on every aspect of life; sometimes involving itself in the finest minutiae of science, in order to express how the Halacha views all that pertains to the modern world. But that view is extrapolated from the inward essence of the Torah outward, not grafted on from the outside.

The Torah addresses the modern world, not in terms of compromise or appeasement, not through pandering to the ideology of the hour, nor to the dictates of the fashions of the world at large. Rather it views the world through intrinsic principles enshrined in immutable criteria.

(Based on Hadrash V'Ha'Iyun)

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CLIFFHANGER

“Do not imitate the practices of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled...” (18:3)

A group of people live on a mountain-top which ends in a sheer cliff and a drop of several thousand feet. One civic-minded fellow, on his own initiative, builds a safety fence to prevent anyone from venturing too close to the edge of the cliff and inadvertently falling off.

Would anyone complain that the fence limited his freedom of movement by making it less likely that he plummet off the mountain to his death?

Often we hear those who do not understand the true nature of rabbinic legislation complain that the Rabbis restricted our lives with unnecessary and complicated extra laws and prohibitions, but one who appreciates the seriousness of transgressing a Torah law - the devastating effects that such transgressions have on the *neshama*, one’s eternal life, and the world in general - feels much more secure knowing that safety fences have been erected to prevent him from plummeting into a spiritual oblivion.

(Adapted from Rabbi Zev Leff’s Outlooks and Insights)

Haftorah: Amos 9: 7-15

DOWN ON THE FARM

“Behold - days are coming - the words of Hashem - when the plower will encounter the reaper...” (9:13)

A “townie”, who had never been out of the city, once found himself in the country, watching a farmer plowing up the earth and sowing seed in the furrows. He thought to himself that here was certainly someone who needed urgent psychiatric help: Someone burying perfectly good grain in the earth so that it would rot!

He left, and went back to town shortly afterward. Had the “townie” stayed in the country longer, he would have witnessed how each rotting seed had given bloom to many heavy sheaves of wheat which had been harvested and its grain gathered in sufficiency for the whole year. Had he stayed, he would certainly have understood that the plowing and sowing were only to achieve this end, and there would have been no question in his mind that the farmer was a lunatic. However, since he returned to the city, he had no idea as to the true purpose of the farmer.

In our days, we look around us at the world, and we see the wicked prosper and the righteous in dire adversity. However, we only see the beginning of the process, not its purpose and completion. In the time-to-come, when there will be a complete revelation of Hashem’s providential guidance in the world, we will understand the purpose of every single event, however seemingly illogical or unfair: The “ploughing” will be seen through the perspective of the “harvesting” - “when the plower will encounter the reaper...”

(Based on the Dubner Maggid)



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

י-ה רבון - KAH RIBON
“G-D, THE MASTER...”

We will sing to You songs and praises in Yerushalayim, the city of beauty.”

וזמרון לך... בירושלם קרתא דשופרית

vizamrun lach...birushlaym karta d'shufra

When the sage Rabbi Yochanan, a man of extraordinary beauty who said of himself that he was the last remnant of the beautiful residents of Yerushalayim, visited his sick colleague Rabbi Elazar, the dark room he lay in was illuminated by the radiance emanating from the skin of the distinguished visitor and Rabbi Elazar burst into tears. Rabbi Yochanan masterfully proved to him that there was no reason to weep over any disappointments he may have experienced in regard to spiritual, material or family achievements but Rabbi Elazar surprised him by explaining that he was weeping at the thought that such extraordinary beauty is destined to wither in the dust. At this both sages wept in unison. (*Berachos* 5b)
Maharsha explains that these sages reflected on the fact that Rabbi Yochanan’s eventual passing would mean the climax of the beauty of Jerusalem as reflected in its residents and they wept in anticipation of this next stage of the decline of the Holy City. The restored Yerushalayim will regain all of its beauty in people and everything else, and it is there that we shall sing the songs of praise we now sing at our Shabbos meal.

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